

2 Corinthians 12 Commentary

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2 CORINTHIANS - PAUL'S MINISTRY IN THE LIGHT OF THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Click chart to enlarge

Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

[Another Chart](#) from Charles Swindoll

[A Third Chart](#)

Overview of Second Corinthians

2Co 1:1-7:16 Character of Paul	2Co 8:1-9:15 Collection for the Saints	2Co 10:1-12:21 Credentials of Paul
Testimonial & Didactic	Practical	Apologetic
Past: Misunderstanding & Explanation	Present: Practical Project	Future: Anxieties
Apostle's Conciliation, Ministry & Exhortations	Apostle's Solicitation for Judean Saints	Apostle's Vindication of Himself
Forgiveness, Reconciliation Gratitude	Confidence	Vindication
Ephesus to Macedonia: Change of Itinerary Explained	Macedonia: Preparation for Visit to Corinth	To Corinth: Certainty and Imminence of the Visit
2Co 1:1-7:16	2Co 8:1-9:15	2Co 10:1-12:21

Adapted & modified from [Jensen's Survey of the New Testament \(Highly Recommended Resource\)](#) & [Wilkinson's Talk Thru the Bible](#)

INTRODUCTIONS TO SECOND CORINTHIANS:

- **IRVING JENSEN** - [Introduction and study tips](#) - excellent preliminary resource - scroll to page 1877 (Notes on both 1-2 Cor begin on p 1829)
- **JOHN MACARTHUR** [2 Corinthians Introduction - same as in the Study Bible](#)
- **JAMES VAN DINE** [2 Corinthians - Author, Purpose, Outline, Argument](#)
- **CHARLES SWINDOLL** - [2 Corinthians Overview](#)
- **MARK SEIFRID** - [The Message of Second Corinthians: 2 Corinthians as the Legitimation of the Apostle](#)
- **J VERNON MCGEE** - [2 Corinthians Introduction](#)
- **DAN WALLACE** - [2 Corinthians: Introduction, Argument, and Outline](#)
- **DAVID MALICK** - [An Introduction To Second Corinthians](#)

2 Corinthians 12:1 Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

Plummer - This glorying is forced upon me. I have indeed nothing to gain by it, for myself or for the good of the Church; but I will pass on to a worthier subject, viz. visions and revelations granted to me by the Lord Jesus Christ. They have been called delusions or inventions, but they are sober fact.

- **is necessary:** 2Co 8:10 Joh 16:7 18:14 1Co 6:12 10:23
- **to boast:** 2Co 12:11 11:16-30
- **visions:** 2Co 12:7 Nu 12:6 Eze 1:1-28 11:24 Da 10:5-10 Joe 2:28,29 Ac 9:10-17 Ac 18:9 22:17-21 23:11 26:13-19 Ga 1:12 2:2 1Jn 5:20
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Galatians 1:11-12+ (GOSPEL RECEIVED BY REVELATION) For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it **through a revelation of Jesus Christ**.

Ray Stedman entitled his sermon on this section "The Ecstasy and the Agony." Interesting!

Boasting ([kauchaomai](#)) **is necessary** ([dei](#)), **though it is not profitable** ([sumphero](#)) - He has no choice but to boast. Why is it morally **necessary**? Why does he feel forced to speak this way? The false apostles and their deceptive, deadly false teaching needs to be refuted by truth which compels Paul to boast in truth. He is not defending himself as much as he is defending the truth. Truth is the antidote for lies. When he says **is not profitable**, he is again alluding to the foolishness of it and the fact that he personally has nothing to be gained from this boasting. He would much rather be teaching other things to edify them, rather than to boast about his experiences. The implication is that it is not profitable in one sense, not to boast could be very costly is the Corinthians are seduced by similar boasting by the false teachers for the danger was ever present that it would lead the saints away from the purity and devotion to Christ.

But I will go on to visions ([optasia](#)) **and revelations** ([apokalupsis](#)) **of the Lord** - It is interesting that here Paul uses first person, but then switches to third person as he describes the actual vision. He clearly is not trying to draw attention to himself in this **boasting of visions and revelations!** Clearly, the super-apostles were making boasts of their "super" (supposedly supernatural) visions and revelations. Only a super vision would blunt their false teaching, and Paul has experienced just such a vision!

Utley on **of the Lord** - It may be a SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE, "a revelation from the Lord" or an OBJECTIVE GENITIVE, "about the Lord." The following context implies "from the Lord" (PASSIVE VOICES, 2Co 12:2, 4, 7).

Plummer on **of the Lord** - Seeing that *kuplou* belongs to both substantives, the genitive is probably subjective; 'visions and revelations which proceed from the Lord,' rather than those in which the Lord is seen and revealed.

G Campbell Morgan - "How often people have wanted to tell me about their **visions!** I am always suspicious. I want to know what

they had for supper the night before! If people have **visions** of this sort they are silent about them.”

Boasting (exult, glory) (2744) **kauchaomai** akin to **aucheo** = boast + **euchomai** = pray to God <> **auchen** = neck which vain persons are apt to carry in proud manner) means to boast over a privilege or possession. The idea is to take pride in something (in a bad sense - Ro 2:23-note, in a good or legitimate sense - Ro 5:2+, Ro 5:3+, Ro 5:11+) **Uses in the Corinthian letters** where it is a **key word!** - 1 Co. 1:29; 1 Co. 1:31; 1 Co. 3:21; 1 Co. 4:7; 2 Co. 5:12; 2 Co. 7:14; 2 Co. 9:2; 2 Co. 10:8; 2 Co. 10:13; 2 Co. 10:15; 2 Co. 10:16; 2 Co. 10:17; 2 Co. 11:12; 2 Co. 11:16; 2 Co. 11:18; 2 Co. 11:30; 2 Co. 12:1; 2 Co. 12:5; 2 Co. 12:6; 2 Co. 12:9;

Profitable (good, advantage, expedient)(4851) **sumphero** from **sún** = together + **phéro** = bring) means literally to bring together (lit. Acts 19:19). Then **sumphero** comes to mean to confer a benefit, to be profitable, advantageous (Mt. 5:29, 30; 18:6; 19:10; John 11:50; 16:7) or useful. The idea is to bring together for the benefit, profit or advantage of another. **15v in NT** - Matt. 5:29; Matt. 5:30; Matt. 18:6; Matt. 19:10; Jn. 11:50; Jn. 16:7; Jn. 18:14; Acts 19:19; Acts 20:20; 1 Co. 6:12; 1 Co. 10:23; 1 Co. 12:7; 2 Co. 8:10; 2 Co. 12:1; Heb. 12:10

Visions (3701) **optasia** from **optánomai** = to appear) describes a coming into view or that which comes into view (cp "optical") - an **apparition**, a vision. In Scripture **optasia** refers to a mystical experience of a supernatural appearance. Paul described his vision of the glorified Jesus on the Damascus Road (Acts 26:19) and his rapture to the third heaven as a vision in 2 Cor 12:1 (see 2 Cor 12:2-8). Here and in Lk 24:23 **optasia** refers to angelic visions. **BDAG** - 1. an event of a transcendent character that impresses itself vividly on the mind, a vision, celestial sight, of that which a deity permits a human being to see, either of the deity personally or of something else usually hidden from mortals 2. state of being that is experienced by one who has a vision, trance. **4v in NT** - Lk. 1:22; Lk. 24:23; Acts 26:19; 2 Co. 12:1

Revelations (602) **apokalupsis** from **apó** = from + **kalúpto** = cover, conceal, English = apocalypse) literally means cover from and so the idea is to remove that which conceals something. **Apokalupsis** conveys the idea of "taking the lid off" and means to remove the cover and expose to open view that which was heretofore not visible, known or disclosed. It means to make manifest or reveal a thing previously secret or unknown. It describes removing of a veil (an unveiling) or covering thus exposing to open view what was concealed. In all its uses, **revelation** refers to something or someone, once hidden, becoming visible and now made fully known. **18v in the NT** - Lk. 2:32; Ro 2:5; Ro 8:19; Ro 16:25; 1Co. 1:7; 1Co. 14:6; 1Co. 14:26; 2Co. 12:1; 2Co. 12:7; Gal. 1:12; Gal. 2:2; Eph. 1:17; Eph. 3:3; 2Th. 1:7; 1Pe 1:7; 1Pe 1:13; 1Pe 4:13; Rev. 1:1

David Guzik - Visions and revelations: Whether they concern angels, Jesus, heaven, or other things, these things are more common in the New Testament than we might think.

- Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, had a vision of an angel (Luke 1:8–23)
- Jesus' transfiguration is described as a vision for the disciples (Matthew 17:9)
- The women who came to visit Jesus' tomb had a vision of angels (Luke 24:22–24)
- Stephen saw a vision of Jesus at his death (Acts 7:55–56)
- Ananias experienced a vision telling him to go to Saul (Acts 9:10)
- Peter had a vision of the clean and unclean animals (Acts 10:17–19 and 11:5)
- Peter had a vision of an angel at his release from prison (Acts 12:9)
- John had many visions on Patmos (Revelation 1:1)
- Paul had a revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:6–11 and 26:12–20)
- Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia, asking him to come to that region to help (Acts 16:9–10)
- Paul had an encouraging vision while in Corinth (Acts 18:9–11)
- Paul had a vision of an angel on the ship that was about to be wrecked (Acts 27:23–25)

2 Corinthians 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

Plummer- I can tell you of a man who was in ecstasy with Christ fourteen years ago—it was Christ's doing and no credit to the man: whether he was still in the body, I cannot tell, or whether he was in rapture away from the body. I cannot tell; that is known to God alone: he was caught up, this man of whom I speak, even to the third heaven.

- **I know a man:** 2Co 12:3,5
- **in Christ:** 2Co 5:17,21 13:5 Isa 45:24,25 Joh 6:56 15:4-6 17:21-23 Ro 8:1 Ro 16:7 1Co 1:30 Ga 1:22 5:6

- **fourteen years ago:** Acts 14:6 Acts 22:17
- **in the body :** 2Co 5:6-8 1Ki 18:12 2Ki 2:16 Eze 8:1-3 11:24 Ac 8:39,40 22:17 Php 1:22,23 Rev 1:10 4:2
- **God knows:** 2Co 12:3 11:11
- **caught up :** 2Co 12:4 Lu 24:51 1Th 4:17 Heb 9:24 Rev 12:5
- **third heaven:** Ge 1:14-20 1Ki 8:27 Isa 57:15
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

1 Thessalonians 4:17+ (**CHURCH WILL BE CAUGHT UP**) Then we who are alive and remain **will be caught up** ([harpazo](#)) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (THIS IS MOST LIKELY THE FIRST HEAVEN), and so we shall always be with the Lord.

Acts 8:39+ (**AN "EARTHLY RAPTURE"**) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **snatched** ([harpazo](#)) Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

PAUL'S FIRST CENTURY "TRIP INTO SPACE"

MacArthur - Paul had received many visions in his life, six of which are recorded in Acts 9:3–12; 16:9–10; 18:9–10; 22:17–21; 23:11; 27:23–24. He had also received the gospel he preached by revelation (Gal. 1:11–12). But the vision he was about to describe was the most amazing and remarkable of them all. With characteristic humility, he related it in the third person. ([2 Corinthians](#))

I know a man [in Christ](#) who fourteen years ago - As noted above, Paul switches from first person to third (a man), which emphasizes his extreme discomfort at even speaking of this vision. **A man [in Christ](#)** is a synonym for a believer (**in** covenant with Christ), which is likely a sarcastic jab at the pseudo-apostles who had recounted their visions but they where not **[in Christ](#)**! They would have a real supernatural vision one day in the future but it would be in the "opposite direction!" Since there is no specific NT reference to this event, we cannot be dogmatic. With that caveat, the time of the writing of this epistle is about 56 AD, so the specific time phrase **fourteen years ago** would have been about 41-42 AD. Some writers feel that this event represents Paul's stoning in [Lystra](#) in Acts 14:9-10+ during the [first missionary journey](#). If one approximates the writing of the present letter as 56 AD and the approximate time of the first journey as 42 AD, that would be **fourteen years** earlier, so it is a possibility but as they say that is **a bit of a stretch** of the chronology, which itself is only an approximation. Others believe this vision occurred before the missionary journeys began which reflects the difficulty in assigning specific times to these events. We can ask Paul when we meet him in glory.

David Guzik on **fourteen years ago** - The important thing to notice is that Paul kept quiet about this for fourteen years, and now he mentions it reluctantly.

Utley on "**I know a man...in Christ** - This is a rabbinical way of speaking of oneself. Paul seems to be reluctant even to mention the incident, but he does so because of his love for this church and the false teachers' claims of spiritual visions. **[In Christ](#)** This was Paul's favorite designation of being a Christian. Believers are identified with His life/death/resurrection (cf. Ro 6:3-11). The believer's goal is to be like Him (cf. Ro 8:29; 2Cor. 3:18; Ga. 4:19; Eph 1:4; 1Th. 3:13; 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:15). **George Ladd**, A Theology of the New Testament, makes the interesting statement that "the man in Christ is also in the Spirit. If the opposite of 'in Christ' is to be in Adam, the opposite of 'in the Spirit' is to be 'in the flesh.' Life in the Spirit means eschatological existence—life in the new age" (p. 483).

Plummer - Reluctantly, and only for a moment, he lifts the veil which usually covers the details of the most sacred moments of his life and allows the Corinthians to see enough to convince them that the revelations of which he has claimed to be the recipient were intensely and supremely real

MacArthur suggests that the event was " sometime between Paul's return to Tarsus from Jerusalem (Acts 9:30) and his commissioning by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1–3). Little is known about that period of Paul's life except that during it he ministered in Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21)." ([2 Corinthians](#))

Utley on "**fourteen years ago**" This was probably during Paul's unrecorded early ministry in Tarsus, just before Barnabas came to get him to help at Antioch (cf. Acts 11:25–26). Notice that Paul had several special visions but they were not an everyday occurrence for him (cf. Acts 9:4; 18:9; 23:11; 27:23).

- [Timeline of Paul's ministry](#)

Whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows- In the body would be literally having his body transported (as in 1Th 4:17), whereas **out of the body** would be his spirit being transported while his body remained on earth

(as in 2Co 5:6-8). Paul said he did not know, so neither can we because only **God knows**. Paul knew where (he was) but not how (his actual state).

Uitley - Paul himself was not even sure exactly what happened (the phrase is repeated twice in 2Co 12:2, 3). It was possibly like Ezekiel's experience in Ezek. 8 or like John's experience in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Notice that the body is not excluded from heaven in Christianity as it was in Greek philosophy.

Such a man was caught up (harpazo) to the third heaven - This was a sudden supernatural event out of Paul's control but orchestrated by the sovereign God. Paul describes himself (**such a man**), in effect being "*raptured*", using the same verb **harpazo** he used in 1Th 4:17+ to describe the saints being "**caught up (harpazo)** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." In simple terms, the **first heaven** is the atmosphere immediately around the earth, the **second heaven** is what we call "outer space." **Gotquestions** adds "If the **third heaven** is God's dwelling place, then we could consider the **second heaven** to be "outer space," the realm of the stars and planets; and the **first heaven** to be earth's atmosphere, the realm of the birds and clouds." (See Uitley's special topic [Heaven](#))

Caught up (carried off, snatched, taken away) (726) **harpazo** from **haireō** = take, in NT only in **middle voice** = haireomai = to take for oneself, to choose; akin to **airo** = to raise up) means to snatch up or way, to seize or seize upon, to steal (see comparison to klepto below), to catch away or up, to pluck, to pull. **Harpazo** means to take suddenly and vehemently, often with violence and speed or quickly and without warning. . The idea is to take by force with a sudden swoop and usually indicates a force which cannot be resisted. In eschatological terms (future events, prophetically related) as in the present verse, **harpazo** refers to what is often known as the "rapture" (Latin = *raptura* = seizing or Latin = *rapio* = seize, snatch) **Harpazo** thus can be translated by the verb to **rapture** which describes the act of conveying or transporting a person from one place to another or from one sphere of existence to another. The English word **rapture** can also convey the idea of ecstasy as with one who is "carried out of" oneself with joy, but that is not the primary sense conveyed by the NT usage here in 1 Thessalonians. 14v in NT - Matt. 11:12; Matt. 12:29; Matt. 13:19; Jn. 6:15; Jn. 10:12; Jn. 10:28; Jn. 10:29; Acts 8:39; Acts 23:10; 2 Co. 12:2; 2 Co. 12:4; 1 Thess. 4:17; Jude 1:23; Rev. 12:5

The third heaven - Unger points out that

"Scripture evidently specifies three heavens, since "the third heaven" is revealed to exist (2Cor 12:2), and it is logical that a third heaven cannot exist without a first and second. . Scripture does not describe specifically the first and second heaven.

The **first**, however, apparently refers to the atmospheric heavens of the birds (Ho 2:18, "sky") and of clouds (Da 7:13).

The **second** heaven may be the stellar spaces (cf. Ge 1:14, 15, 16, 17, 18). It is the abode of all supernatural angelic beings.

The third heaven is the abode of the Triune God. Its location is unrevealed. It is the divine plan at present to populate the third heaven. It is a place (John 14:1, 2, 3). It is called "glory" (Heb 2:10-note); those who enter it will be perfected forever (Heb 10:14-note) and made partakers of Christ's fullness (John 1:16), which is all fullness (Col. 1:19-note) and which comprehends the very nature of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9-note). The apostle John was called into heaven (Rev. 4:1-note). The apostle Paul was caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-9). He was prohibited, however, from revealing what he saw and heard. Heaven is a place of beauty (Rev 21:1-22:7), of life (1Ti 4:8), service (Re 22:3-note), worship (Rev 19:1-note, Re 19:2-note, Re 19:3-note), and glory (2Co 4:17, 18)." ([Unger, M. E., Harrison, R. K., Vos, H. F., Barber, C. J., and Unger, M. F. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

Marvin Vincent writes that "The conception of seven heavens was familiar to the Jews; but according to some of the Rabbins there were two heavens — the visible clouds and the sky; in which case the third heaven would be the invisible region beyond the sky." (Vincent, M. R. Word studies in the New Testament. Vol. 3, Page 1-354)

1) FIRST HEAVEN = the earth's atmosphere, the realm in which we live that contains the oxygen we breathe. This is the heaven that contains the clouds.

John MacArthur ([Heaven. Chicago: Moody Press](#)) explains the first heaven refers to ""the troposphere—the atmosphere around the earth, the air we breathe. For example, Isaiah 55:9 says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven..." Here the word heaven refers to the atmosphere, which is where the hydrological cycle occurs. In Psalm 147:8 ([Spurgeon's note](#)) says that God "covers the heavens with clouds." That is the first heaven." See also (Ge 8:2; Dt 11:11; 1Ki 8:35)

2) SECOND HEAVEN = interplanetary and interstellar space. The second heaven contains the stars, moons, and planets. For example in Genesis 1

"God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens...God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth" (Ge 1:14, 16,17) See also Ge 15:5; Ps 8:3; Is 13:10).

3) THIRD HEAVEN = the abode or dwelling place of God

Paul writes

2Cor 12:2 know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago-- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- such a man was caught up to the third heaven. (What a contrast between being "let down" in a basket and being "caught up" to the third heaven in Acts 9:25, 2Co 11:33!) And I know how such a man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows-- was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

Psalm 102:19 ([Note](#)) says, "He looked down from His holy height; from heaven the Lord gazed upon the earth." (See also 1Ki 8:30; 2Ch 30:27; Ps 123:1 ([Spurgeon note](#))).

Paul equates the "third heaven with "[Paradise](#)" ("walled garden") in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. One can also compare Revelation 2:7 ([note](#)) with Revelation 22:14 ([note](#)). In Revelation 2:7 ([note](#)) John writes 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.' Again in Revelation 22:14 ([note](#)) John writes "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city." **Paradise** is synonymous with the abode of God, the third heaven.

In the conclusion of his article entitled "[The New Testament Concept Regarding the Regions of Heaven with Emphasis on 2 Corinthians 12:1-4](#) *Grace Journal Volume 11, Winter, 1970*" **W. Harold Mare** writes "As to the regions of heaven, we observe that the New and Old Testaments agree in conceiving of heaven as basically involving three different areas, the lower, the higher and highest heaven in the last of which God particularly dwells, and we conclude that Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 has this last area in mind when he talks about the third heaven, implying the two other regions by his use of the word, third. Furthermore, the third heaven where God dwells and where Paul received divine instruction is not to be thought of necessarily as involving a spiritual, non-spatial relationship only, but also as involving space, somewhere out there in the highest or third heaven, beyond our immediate earth and heaven, there being a place where a human being with a body and God who is everywhere can meet."

In conclusion, it is worth noting that by virtue of the marvels of modern science, man has been able to visit the first heaven of the clouds (most of us have flown in this this first heaven) and a select few have even visited the the heaven of the planets, the second heaven (including some who have have walked upon the moon), but man is unable to go to the third heaven, the abode of God (using that term loosely since He is infinite and omnipresent!), without His assistance. Perhaps you are reading this article out of curiosity but you don't really know whether you will go to heaven when your life on earth is over. You lack the absolute assurance that God makes available to all freely by grace through faith (see Ephesians 2:8-10+) in His Son Jesus Christ. So let me ask you...

Would you go to heaven if you died tonight?

Do you want to go to heaven?

Do you want to know the way?

If you do, then take a few moments and read the two short pamphlets by the renowned 19th Century American evangelist **Dwight Lyman Moody**...

- [The Way to God & How to Find It](#) - D L Moody
- [Heaven: Where It Is, Its Inhabitants and How To Get There](#) - D L Moody
- [My personal testimony](#) - Bruce Hurt, MD

QUESTION - [What does it mean that Paul went to the third heaven?](#)

ANSWER - [Paul](#) describes a time when he was caught up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). He mentions himself in the third person:

"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no

one is permitted to tell.”

The word **heavens** can be used to refer to different realms. **Heavens** can refer to the sky and the earth’s atmosphere, making it the “**first heaven**” (Deuteronomy 11:11; Psalm 104:12; Isaiah 55:10). It can also refer to outer space, where the stars and planets are—the “**second heaven**” (Psalm 8:3; Isaiah 13:10). And it can refer to God’s dwelling place, which is beyond the other **heavens**,” a place known as the “**third heaven**” (Psalm 33:13–14; Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 6:9; Hebrews 7:26; Revelation 11:19). When Paul says that he went to the third heaven, he means that he went to the place where God dwells.

Interestingly, Paul uses the phrase **caught up** to refer to how he was transported to heaven; it’s the same Greek word used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to refer to the [rapture of the church](#). Following his list of “boasts” in 2 Corinthians 11:22–33, Paul further verifies his apostolic office by including his “visions and revelations from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 12:1). The apostle is unsure whether he was physically in the body or apart from the body when he experienced heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–3). While there, he heard and saw things that he couldn’t describe and was forbidden to relate (verse 4). Some believe this event occurred during Paul’s first missionary journey, when he was stoned and left for dead in Lystra, but we can’t be sure. The privilege of seeing heaven no doubt gave Paul courage to face his later trials and suffering (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Christians today may have not seen the **third heaven** as Paul did, we can be just as confident of our future in heaven because we are in Christ. The Bible does not tell us everything we might like to know about heaven, but we know that it will be a wonderful place where we will dwell with Christ (John 14:3). Paul knew that being with Christ is far better than anything he could experience on earth (Philippians 1:21–23). Until the day we eternally enter God’s presence, we can state with confidence along with the apostle Paul, “For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:7–8). [GotQuestions.org](#)

QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about an out of body experience / astral projection?](#)

ANSWER - Information about the “out-of-body” experience is both vast and subjective. According to Wikipedia, one out of ten people claims to have had an out-of-body experience (OBE). Out-of-body experiences range from involuntary out-of-body experiences or near-death experiences that happen after or during a trauma or accident, to “astral projection,” in which a person voluntarily tries to leave his or her body behind and ascend to a spiritual plane where truth and clarity can be found.

A few famous Christians have had what might be called, in today’s world, an out-of-body experience, most notably the apostle Paul. He says in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4, “I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.” In the verses preceding this passage, Paul lists his “boasts” or the things that, if he were counting on works and good deeds to secure his salvation, would get him into heaven. Though he seems to be referring to someone else, scholars agree that he is speaking of himself in the third person. Paul includes this apparent out-of-body experience in his list of boasts. Out-of-body experiences are sensational, but, as Paul says, “There is nothing to be gained by it.” This does not mean that his out-of-body experience wasn’t real, only that he is not relying on it to really benefit himself or others in any way.

An involuntary out-of-body experience or a near-death experience should be treated in the same way as a dream in the life of a Christian—an unexplained phenomenon that may make a good story, but does not give us truth. The only place we find absolute truth is in the Word of God. All other sources are merely subjective human accounts or interpretations based on what we can discover with our finite minds.

A voluntary out-of-body experience, or an “astral projection,” is spiritually dangerous. A person practicing astral projection or trying to achieve an out-of-body experience in order to connect with the spirit world is practicing the [occult](#). There are two forms of this. The first is called the “phasing” model, in which the person tries to find new spiritual truth by accessing a part of the mind that is “shut off” during everyday life. This practice is connected to [Buddhism](#) or [postmodernism](#) and the belief that enlightenment is achieved by looking within oneself. The other form, called the “mystical” model, involves the person trying to exit the body entirely, with his or her spirit traveling to a mystical plane unconnected to the physical world.

The Bible explicitly warns against occult practice, or sorcery, and that warning can be applied to voluntary out-of-body experiences and astral projection (see Galatians 5:19–20). God’s commands are always for our good, and He commands us to stay far away from occult practices. There is great potential, when trying to access the spiritual world, of opening oneself up to demons who can lie to us about God and confuse our minds. The phasing model of out-of-body experiences is also futile, according to Scripture. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?” It is futile to search for infinite wisdom inside the finite mind of man.

Involuntary out-of-body experiences have made their way into some recent books and movies. One example is the popular book [90 Minutes in Heaven](#) by Pastor Don Piper. Piper describes what is, in essence, an out-of-body experience he had after a severe car accident, during which he believes he died and went to heaven for ninety minutes. Whether or not Piper did actually see heaven or spend time there is debatable, and in the end nobody but God knows. However, there is a serious problem, theologically speaking, with the conclusion Piper draws from his experience. He tells the reader that, now that he has been to heaven, he can speak comfort to grieving people at funerals "with more authority" than he could previously. Piper's motives are good: he wants to give people hope. However, it is dead wrong to say that his own subjective experience will give him more authority to administer the hope of heaven to others. Scripture, by itself, apart from our experience, is *the* authority.

In conclusion, an out-of-body experience will give us neither truth nor knowledge. If an involuntary out-of-body experience occurs in the life of a Christian, the best approach would be to consider it in the same category as a dream—interesting, perhaps, but not a reliable source of truth. Christians should not seek to have out-of-body experiences or practice astral projection. We are to find truth only in the words of God, as Jesus prays in John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." [GotQuestions.org](#)

Related Resources:

- [What is the second heaven? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Is the idea of seven heavens / the seventh heaven biblical? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is Heaven like? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is paradise? Is paradise a different place than Heaven? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Where is heaven? What is the location of heaven? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Are there different levels of Heaven? Are there three heavens? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Does the Bible say anything about teleportation? | GotQuestions.org](#)

2 Corinthians 12:3 And I know how such a man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows--

Plummer- I can tell you also that this man of whom I speak, either in the body or apart from the body (God knows which),

- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SOUL IN BODY OR OUT OF BODY?

And I know (eido) how such a man - Know is the verb [eido](#) which describes knowledge which is [beyond a shadow of doubt](#). Paul continues talking about this **man** (himself) as he explains how he was caught up to the third heaven.

Whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows- NLT = "Whether my body was there or just my spirit, I don't know; only God knows." Paul repeats that even he did not know the nature of how he was caught up, whether physically (body and soul) or spiritually (cf [out of body](#)), but only God knew the truth that it was an actual event. His repetition of the verb **know/knows** emphasizes that he believed this was not a fantasy of his imagination but was a real event. With the second "knows" Paul alludes to God as his Witness of the veracity of this "outer space trip."

2 Corinthians 12:4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

Plummer- was caught up into the Paradise where God dwells, and there listened to utterances unutterable, such as no human being is allowed to repeat.

- **paradise:** Eze 31:9 Lu 23:43 Rev 2:7
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Luke 23:43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in **Paradise**."

Revelation 2:7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the **Paradise** of God.'

PAUL PASSING INTO PARADISE

Was caught up into Paradise - Paul continues his description of the vision and revelation, repeating the fact that he was actually **caught up**. Initially he had stated he was **caught up** to the third heaven and now refers to it as **Paradise**. There is no reason from the context to not see these two terms as synonymous.

David Guzik - Some early Christians wrongly thought **Paradise** was the place where souls of believers went after death to await resurrection. Some of them (like the ancient theologian Origen) even believed **Paradise** was located somewhere on the earth's surface.

And heard inexpressible words (rhema), which a man is not permitted to speak - These were visions and yet Paul gives absolutely not one comment about what he saw. He is seeking to downplay this event, as its main purpose is to refute the experiences of the false teachers. This was a real event, one in which he heard actual words (aorist active indicative - mood of reality) uttered, even though he could not repeat what he heard. **Inexpressible** (arrhetos - only used here) means either "that cannot be expressed, since it is beyond human powers," or "that must not be expressed, since it is holy, not to be spoken." (BDAG) The implication is that he heard literal spoken words for he uses the noun **rhema** which places emphasis on something actually spoken. **Permitted (exesti)** is modified by the Greek absolute negative (ou) indicating that it was absolutely no lawful, right or permissible for him to speak these words.

MacArthur on inexpressible words - The veil between earth and heaven remains in place. What God wants known about heaven is revealed in the Bible; as for the rest, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God" (Deut. 29:29+). ([2 Corinthians](#))

Utley on inexpressible words - Humanity's curiosity is not to be eased in all areas of truth. As Lazarus did not speak of the grave, Paul would not, could not, share this experience. There is an obvious word play on "unspeakable" (arrētos, "speech," and hrētos), or possibly this was a technical idiom of the mystery religion's initiation rites. Possibly there simply was not human vocabulary adequate to express what he saw (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9).

NET NOTE - In the NT, paradise is mentioned three times. In Luke 23:43 it refers to the abode of the righteous dead. In Rev 2:7 it refers to the restoration of Edenic paradise predicted in Isa 51:3 and Ezek 36:35. The reference here in 2 Cor 12:4 is probably to be translated as parallel to the mention of the "third heaven" in v. 2. Assuming that the "first heaven" would be atmospheric heaven (the sky) and "second heaven" the more distant stars and planets, "third heaven" would refer to the place where God dwells. This is much more likely than some variation on the seven heavens mentioned in the pseudepigraphic book 2 Enoch and in other non-biblical and rabbinic works.

THOUGHT - The true measure of a man of God does not lie in his claims of visions and experiences with God, or the force of his personality, the size of his ministry, his educational degrees, or any other human criteria. **A true man of God is marked by how much he has suffered in the war against the kingdom of darkness, how concerned he is for people, how humble he is, and how accurately he handles the supernatural revelation found in God's Word** (2Ti 2:15). Like Paul, such men patiently endure the suffering and humiliation of this life, knowing that such "momentary, light affliction is producing ... an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). ([John MacArthur - 2 Corinthians](#))

Inexpressible (731)(arretos) means (1) of what cannot be expressed in words inexpressible, unspeakable; (2) of what should not or must not be expressed too sacred. **Gilbrant** - Classical and Hellenistic writers understood arrhētos to mean "unsaid" or "unspoken." A subtle nuance, according to context, might be that something was too horrible or shameful to mention (cf. Josephus Wars of the Jews 7.8.1). Classical Greek also perceived that the "unmentionable matter" could be in reference to divine or sacred mysteries as well as secular matters (Liddell-Scott). It was commonly used in this way according to papyri finds (Moulton-Milligan). The expression only occurs at 2 Corinthians 12:4 in the New Testament. In his forced and reluctant self-praise Paul told that 14 years before (so we see the apostle was not in a hurry to make known his glorious experience) he was caught up into Paradise where he heard unspeakable words, things which it is not lawful for a man to utter. With this expression a double lock has been placed on the secret: in itself the experience was unspeakable, impossible to utter or describe in human words, and it was also forbidden to say! There are some examples in the Bible of men who have received secret revelations. Isaiah 8:16 speaks of sealing a revelation by keeping it secret within the body of the disciples, that is, among a chosen body of initiated ones. Daniel was told that some of the revelations he received were to be hidden and sealed until the time of the end. Then many would investigate his book, and the

knowledge of these things would become great (Daniel 12:4, 9). John was about to write down what the seven thunders had spoken, but he was told he should seal it up and not write it (Revelation 10:1–4). ([Complete Biblical Library - Incredible Resource](#))

Words (4487) **rhema** from verb **rheo** = to speak - to say, speak or utter definite words) refers to the spoken word, especially a word as uttered by a living voice. **Laleo** is another word translated speak but it refers only to uttering a sound whereas **rheo** refers to uttering a definite intelligible word. **Rhema** refers to any sound produced by the voice which has a definite meaning. It focuses upon the content of the communication.

QUESTION - [What is paradise? Is paradise a different place than Heaven?](#)

ANSWER - Paradise is a place of blessing where the righteous go after death. The word *paradise* is usually used as a synonym for “heaven” (Revelation 2:7).

When Jesus was dying on the cross and one of the thieves being crucified with Him asked Him for mercy, Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Jesus knew that His death was imminent and that He would soon be in heaven with His Father. Therefore, Jesus used “paradise” as a synonym for “heaven.” The apostle Paul wrote of someone (probably himself) who “was caught up to paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:3). In this context, *paradise* obviously refers to heaven.

There has always been a separation of believers and unbelievers after death (Luke 16:19-31). The righteous have always gone to paradise; the wicked have always gone to hell. For right now, both paradise and hell are “temporary holding places” until the day when Jesus Christ comes back to judge the world based on whether or not individuals have believed in Him. The first resurrection is of believers who will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive rewards based on meritorious service to Him. The second resurrection will be that of unbelievers who will stand before the Great White Throne Judgment of God. At that point, all will be sent to their eternal destination—the wicked to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15), and the righteous to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21—22).

There are cases in which *paradise* can refer to the Garden of Eden, such in the Douay-Rheims translation of Genesis 3:8, which speaks of Adam and Eve hiding “amidst the trees of paradise.” The context of the word will determine whether it refers to heaven or Eden. [GotQuestions.org](#)

Related Resources:

- [What is the difference between Sheol, Hades, Hell, the lake of fire, Paradise, and Abraham's bosom? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Is "Paradise Lost" by John Milton biblical? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What did Jesus mean when He said, "Today you will be with me in paradise"? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What will we be doing in Heaven? What will we do in Heaven? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Where did Old Testament believers/saints go when they died? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Paradise (3857) **paradeisos** in a word borrowed from the Persian word for garden, park or enclosure full of vegetable products (cf Eccl 2:5). It is used only 3x in the NT but some 45x in the OT and most of the uses in the Septuagint are translated garden, and specifically of the Garden of Eden (Ge 2:8). It is ironic that man sinned in the first Garden but in the future "Garden" will be forever sinless because of the blood of the Lamb. In Isaiah 51:3 *paradeisos* is used to describe future of redeemed and restored Zion (and the nation) in the Messianic Kingdom as like the bliss of the Garden of Eden before sin entered writing "Indeed, the LORD will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places. And her wilderness He will make like Eden, And her desert like the garden of the LORD; Joy and gladness will be found in her, Thanksgiving and sound of a melody." 3v - Lk. 23:43; 2 Co. 12:4; Rev. 2:7

The Best Fishing Holes

He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words. —2 Corinthians 12:4

Today's Scripture & Insight: Revelation 22:1-5

My friend Gus passed away a few months ago. Gus was a fellow trout fisherman. Weekends usually found him in his little boat on a nearby lake, casting for fish. I got a letter from his daughter Heidi the other day. She told me she's been talking about heaven with her grandkids since Gus went to his home in heaven. Her 6-year-old grandson, who also loves to fish, explained what heaven is like and what Great-Grandpa Gus is doing: "It's really beautiful," he mused, "and Jesus is showing Grandpa Gus where the best fishing holes are."

When Paul reported his God-given vision of heaven, words failed him. He said, "I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words" (2 Cor. 12:4 nlt). Words cannot convey the facts of heaven—perhaps because

we humans are unable to comprehend them.

While we might gain some comfort from knowing more details about heaven, it is not the knowledge of heaven that assures us; it is our knowledge of God Himself. Because I know Him and I know how good He is, I can leave this life and everything in it with utter confidence that heaven will be beautiful and Jesus will show me "where the best fishing holes are"—because that's the kind of God He is! By: David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Nothing on earth compares to being with Christ in heaven.

2 Corinthians 12:5 On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses.

Plummer- Of such a man as this, not knowing his own condition and yet so honoured, I am prepared to glory; but of myself personally, such as you know me, I am not prepared to glory, except as regards what I have called my weaknesses.

- **such:** 2Co 12:2-4
- **But on my own behalf :** 2Co 12:9,10 11:30
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BOASTING IN THE RIGHT THINGS

On behalf of such a man I will boast ([kauchaomai](#)) - Paul again in [deference](#) and profound humility says he will speak for **such a man** and in fact even boast. Note that Paul is not boasting in personal accomplishments but in God and His revelation to him.

It is notable that in this mention of **boast** Paul distances himself from the event using the phrase **such a man**, whereas in 2Co 12:9 he reverts to the first person when he says "I will rather **boast** about my weaknesses." This also clearly speaks to Paul's profound humility. O, how I need to emulate this man's heart!

But on my own behalf I will not boast ([kauchaomai](#)) , **except in regard to my weaknesses** - Here Paul switches to first person saying he would not boast. This would seem to be saying he would not boast as humans typically boast of some great spiritual experience. In fact, rather than taking the "high" (third heaven) road, he chooses to take the "low" road of humility and to boast about his **weaknesses**, not his strengths. What better way would the power of God in his apostolic ministry be manifest, then through a man who declared "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." (2Co 4:7+)

MacArthur adds "How else could his immense impact be explained, except that God's power was at work in him? As his enemies were quick to point out, Paul's "personal presence [was] unimpressive and his speech contemptible" (2Co 10:10+). But what they failed to understand was that, paradoxically, Paul was strongest when he was weakest (2Co 12:10)." ([2 Corinthians](#))

2 Corinthians 12:6 For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

Plummer- I am not bound to abstain in this way, for if I choose to glory about other things, I shall not be a fool in so doing, for I shall only be saying what is true; but I do abstain, because I do not want anyone to form a higher estimate of me than that which he can gather from what he sees me do or hears me say.

- **For if I do wish to boast** 2Co 10:8 11:16 1Co 3:5,9,10
- **I will be speaking** 2Co 1:18 11:31 Job 24:25 Ro 9:1
- **will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me** 2Co 12:7 10:9,10
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PAUL BOASTS IN THE

TRUTH, GOD'S TRUTH

For if I do wish to boast ([kauchaomai](#)) I will not be foolish ([aphron](#)), for I will be speaking the truth - If introduces a third class conditional statement. Paul is saying if he wished to boast, he would not be doing so as one "bragging." He would boast and it would not be boasting like a fool or a "witless braggart" (Amp) And the reason (**for** = **gar** = explanation) he could boast this way is simply because his boasting would be based on the plain truth, and **[nothing but the truth](#)**, and not supposition or exaggeration.

But I (present tense - continually) **refrain ([pheidomai](#)) from this** - NLT = "But 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." Paul continually (present tense) voluntarily held himself (middle voice) back from boasting about this vision in the sense of bragging about it.

So that no one will credit ([logizomai](#)) me with more than he sees in me or hears from me - NLT = "because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message." **Credit** is the verb [logizomai](#) which was actually an accounting term. Paul say don't put this on my spiritual account. In other words Paul did not want others focusing on him because of the spectacular vision and thinking more highly of him because of this experience.

THOUGHT - A righteous life in a man or woman holding fast to the Word of Truth and trusting the Spirit for empowerment is the true measure of one's spiritual maturity, not whether they have had "mystical" experiences. To obey is always better than sacrifice! (1Sa 15:22).

David Guzik - Paul felt it was important to mention this experience but not to dwell on it in any way. He wasn't trying to "sell" himself to the Corinthian Christians. In fact, he holds back from his description (But I forbear), because he didn't want to persuade the Corinthian Christians that he was just another "super apostle" (lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me). If the Corinthian Christians thought Paul was weak and different from the "super apostles," that was fine with him. He wanted the Corinthian Christians to see the glory of God expressed in weakness, not to see him as "great" as the "super apostles" claimed to be.

MacArthur explains **so that no one will credit me** - he wisely decided to refrain from resting his case for his apostleship on his vision. The problem was that it was not repeatable, verifiable, or even fully comprehensible. Using it to prove his apostleship would open the door for charlatans to claim authority to speak for God based on their own alleged mystical experiences. Besides, the vision did not draw him closer to God; in fact, it was actually a source of temptation to pride (2Co 12:7). ([2 Corinthians](#))

Utley suggests Paul's statement is "**[dripping with sarcasm](#)**. These false teachers flaunted many past experiences and credentials, which the Corinthians only heard about. Paul says, "do not credit me with what I have not shown you, but with what I have done while among you. Look at my record!"

Homer Kent explains that Paul "even refrained from a conservative, factual sort of boasting lest a wrong impression be gained. He wanted no one to elevate him beyond the realm of ordinary humans on the basis of his boasting about his unique revelations. He preferred to let his followers base their conclusions on what they saw him do or heard him teach. By stressing his weaknesses rather than his unusual privileges, God rather than the man would get the credit." ([A Heart Opened Wide: Studies in 2 Corinthians](#))

Refrain ([5339](#)) **[pheidomai](#)** means to treat leniently, to forbear, to spare. To avoid or refrain from doing something. To save someone from trouble, loss or discomfort (2Co 1:21, 1Co 7:28, With a negative = Acts 20:29, Ro 8:32) To prevent trouble from happening to someone (e.g., see Lxx uses - Ge 19:16 where "put him outside the city" is translated with **[pheidomai](#)** = "the Lord spared him"!, Ge 20:6). 9v in NT - Acts 20:29; Rom. 8:32; Rom. 11:21; 1 Co. 7:28; 2 Co. 1:23; 2 Co. 12:6; 2 Co. 13:2; 2 Pet. 2:4; 2 Pet. 2:5

2 Corinthians 12:7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself!

Phillips - So tremendous, however, were the revelations that God gave me that, in order to prevent my becoming absurdly conceited, I was given a physical handicap—one of Satan's angels—to harass me and effectually stop any conceit.

Plummer - And then there is the exceeding greatness of the revelations. Therefore, in order that I should not be exalted overmuch about these, there was given to me a painful malady, like a stake driven into my flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch.

- **Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations:** 2Co 10:5 11:20 De 8:14 17:20 2Ch 26:16 32:25,26,31 Da 5:20 1Ti 3:6

- **surpassing greatness of the revelations:** 2Co 12:1-4
- **a thorn:** Ge 32:25,31 Jud 2:3 Eze 28:24 Ga 4:13
- **messenger:** Job 2:7 Lu 13:16 1Co 5:5
- to buffet: Mt 26:67 1Co 4:11
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Job 2:5-6 (SATAN'S PHYSICAL AFFECT ON JOB) "However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." 6 So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." (GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS CLEAR).

Luke 13:16+ (SATAN'S ABILITY TO BIND A WOMAN) "And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

Galatians 4:13 but you know that it was **because of a bodily illness** that I preached the gospel to you the first time;

Genesis 50:20 (GOD USES "THORNS" TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES) "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

THE THORNY SOLUTION TO SELF-EXALTATION

Listen to the wise words from **Warren Wiersbe** - The Lord knows how to balance our lives. If we have only blessings, we may become proud; so He permits us to have burdens as well....When you walk along the shore of the ocean, you notice that the rocks are sharp in the quiet coves, but polished in those places where the waves beat against them. God can use the "waves and billows" of life to polish us, if we will let Him.

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations ([apokalupsis](#)) - Paul acknowledge the magnitude of the visions using the rare noun **surpassing** ([huperbole](#)), the same word he had used earlier to describe the "**surpassing** greatness of the power" in himself as a mere "clay jar" (2Co 4:7NET) and then the future "eternal weight of glory (as) **far beyond all comparison** ([huperbole](#) eis [huperbole](#))." (2Co 4:17+)

THOUGHT - "Mountain top" experiences spiritually speaking are not infrequently followed by "thorns in the flesh" so to speak, these "thorns" being allowed/sent in order to keep us humble and destroy our tendency to exalt self! Been there, done that, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and many of you probably said a soft "Amen," for you too have experience "divine thorns."

R. J. Reid echoes the preceding thought - "A man in Christ" is safe in the presence of God as he listens to the untranslatable things spoken in paradise, but he needs "a thorn in the flesh" upon his return to earth, for the flesh in him would boast of his paradise experience.

For this reason - Because of the wonder and preeminence of what God had revealed to him in Paradise!

To keep me from exalting myself - To **keep** him from being puffed up or getting a "[big head](#)" as we might say today. Paul knew his fallen flesh would love to take some credit for those revelations so that he would look better in the eyes of others. Paul did not want to entertain the thought of an undue sense of self-importance. Fallen flesh (which Paul had just as we all have!) always seeks to proudly elevate the "big I" at the expense of giving glory to the only "I Am!"

THOUGHT - Do not miss the "point" (pun intended) that even the greatest spiritual experiences have absolutely ability to destroy our intractably prideful flesh. My flesh is as depraved and dangerous today as it was 36 years ago when I was saved. **MacDonald** adds that "Even after the apostle had listened to the language of Paradise, he still had the old nature, and was in danger of falling into the snare of pride."

PRINCIPLE:

There is not one of us, no matter how long we have walked with Jesus, that we are immune to the seductive snare of pride.

Remember that this **thorn** ([skolops](#)) **in the flesh** has been present 14 years and will continue for another 13 years (times are

estimated), but the important point is that it would be present essentially the majority of the time Paul was in full-time ministry! And when the "thorn" was given to him initially, he had no idea this was going to be a lifelong affliction (as it appears it was, which make sense because pride was ever waiting to "jump on Paul").

There was given me a thorn ([skolops](#)) **in the flesh a messenger of Satan to** ([present tense](#)) **torment** ([kolaphizo](#) - buffet, beat, strike) **me--to keep me from exalting** ([huperairo](#) in present tense) **myself** - It is so easy to forget the life lessons the Lord teaches us, even those lessons we thought we would never forget! Paul is just like us and so God gives him a reminder. **Was given** is a divine passive, for it was the omniscient, all loving God Who gave (or allowed) Paul this gift of **the thorn**. The word **thorn** ([skolops](#)) can also be translated stake, and this would imply that whatever this was in Paul, was not a simple, superficial cut that would not heal, but something that was more intense. The phrase **in the flesh** would support the premise that the **thorn** was something to do with his physical body. Speculation on the identity of the thorn is endless, but clearly God does not think that is important for us to know. What is important of course is the purpose as we see in 2Co 12:9-10. Was the thorn physical or spiritual. I personally think physical but cannot prove it. I am reminded that Spurgeon was plagued by depression as well as physical ailments (such as painful attacks of gout)

THOUGHT - When God sovereignly *sends* or *allows* (cf Job 1:12) some unexpected trial, affliction, malady, etc, in our life, do we receive it as a manifestation of His loving AFFECTION, or as an INFLICTION? Do we see it as something to make us "BETTER" or "BITTER?" If the latter, memorize and meditate on James 1:2-8+ (cf 1Pe 1:6-7+).

Torment ([kolaphizo](#)) means to beat as when one strikes another with their fist, but here is used figuratively denoting attacks which from the context seem to undoubtedly be painful to Paul. And in the [present tense torment](#) means this continuous action. In other words it was a "chronic" condition (or a least continually recurring) that continually served to remind Paul that despite the wondrous supernatural revelation, he was still a mere mortal living on terra firma (and not in the third heaven)! The sovereign God, much like in the affliction of Job, allowed this **thorn** to be given to Paul delivered by **a messenger of Satan**. Paul repeats the phrase **to keep me from exalting myself** for emphasis. On the other hand this messenger (as with Job) was used by God to accomplish His purposes through His instrument. Recall that Jesus had said "I will show Him how much he must suffer for my sake."

Spurgeon on given to me - "He says, 'There was **given to me**.' He reckoned his great trial to be a gift. It is well put. He does not say, 'There was inflicted upon me a thorn in the flesh,' but 'There was **given to me**.' "

Paul reckoned his great trial to be a gift. It is well-put. He does not say, "There *was inflicted* on me a thorn in the flesh," but "There was *given* to me." This is holy reckoning. Child of God, among all the goods of your house, you have not one single article that is a better token of divine love to you than your daily cross. If you were to tell your child that you would grant him any-thing he asked for, you would not intend by that to give him a poisonous drug, if someone should delude him into the idea that it would be useful to him. You would mean that you would give your child all that was really good for him. God, therefore, knowing that this thorn in the flesh was a sacred medicine to Paul, would not take it away, even though most urgently requested to do so. So, though refused, Paul was answered. Whatever would be good for you, Christ's grace is sufficient to bestow. Whatever would harm you, his grace is sufficient to avert. Whatever you desire, His grace is sufficient to give, if it be good for you. Whatever you would avoid, His grace can shield you from it if His wisdom shall dictate.

Homer Kent - Some commentators explain "flesh" as his human nature, and suggest such things as sensual passion as the "thorn." It is more common to regard "flesh" here as the physical body (as in Gal. 4:13, NASB marg.), and explain the "thorn" as an ailment such as epilepsy, headaches, eye disease, or malaria. ([A Heart Opened Wide: Studies in 2 Corinthians](#))

John MacArthur - Certainly, because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations he had experienced (Acts records six visions apart from the one related in this passage; he also received the gospel he preached by revelation [Gal. 1:11–12; cf. Eph. 3:3]), pride was a constant temptation. Therefore, to keep him humble, Paul was given ... a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment him. ([2 Corinthians](#))

David Guzik on a messenger of Satan to torment me - To buffet me means that this thorn in the flesh—the messenger of Satan—"punched" Paul. He felt that he was beaten black and blue by this messenger of Satan. i. Paul, punched about by the devil? Who would have thought it? "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." (Redpath)

Wiersbe on the identity of the **thorn** - It was a physical affliction of some kind that brought pain and distress to Paul (ED: NOT

EVERYONE AGREES IT WAS PHYSICAL. SOME THINK IT WAS A "SPIRITUAL THORN"). Some Bible students think that Paul had an eye affliction (see Gal 6:11); but we cannot know for sure. It is a good thing that we do not know, because no matter what our sufferings may be, we are able to apply the lessons Paul learned and get encouragement.....God permitted Satan to afflict Paul, just as He permitted Satan to afflict Job (see Job 1-2). While we do not fully understand the origin of evil in this universe, or all the purposes God had in mind when He permitted evil to come, we do know that God controls evil and can use it even for His own glory. Satan cannot work against a believer without the permission of God. Everything that the enemy did to Job and Paul was permitted by the will of God.....There are those who want us to believe that an afflicted Christian is a disgrace to God. "If you are obeying the Lord and claiming all that you have in Christ," they say, "then you will never be sick." I have never found that teaching in the Bible....If Paul had access to "instant healing" because of his relationship to Christ, then why didn't he make use of it for himself and for others, such as Epaphroditus? (Phil. 2:25ff)

THOUGHT - "What a contrast between Paul's two experiences! Paul went from paradise to pain, from glory to suffering. He tasted the blessing of God in heaven and then felt the buffeting of Satan on earth. He went from ecstasy to agony, and yet the two experiences belong together. His one experience of glory prepared him for the constant experience of suffering (JUST READ 2Co 11:22-33), for he knew that God was able to meet his need. Paul had gone to heaven—but then he learned that heaven could come to him." (Wiersbe)

Paul is not saying illnesses or difficulties in ministry are always the work of Satan - in any event Satan always has to "check in with God" - cp Job 1:8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Note that God's purpose was for Paul's good - to keep Paul from becoming prideful, the major hindrance to the flow of grace in one's ministry! See Jas 4:6+. Has the Almighty allowed a "thorn" in your side? If so consider it all joy! Our pain if received rightly can be spiritually productive in God's plan for our life. (Jas 1:2+, Jas 1:3, 4+)

Surpassing (beyond all comparison, more excellent) (5236) **hyperbole** from **hyperballo** = a throwing beyond the usual mark from **hyper** = above + **ballo** = cast) refers to a degree which exceeds extraordinarily a point on an implied or overt scale of extent. It means extraordinary, far more, much greater, to a far greater degree, surpassing, beyond measure, utterly. **7v in NT** - all comparison(1), beyond*(1), excessively*(1), far...all comparison(1), measure(1), more excellent(1), surpassing greatness(2), utterly(1). - Ro 7:13; 1Co. 12:31; 2Co. 1:8; 2Co. 4:7 - "surpassing greatness of the power"; 2Co. 4:17 - "beyond all comparison"; 2Co. 12:7; Gal. 1:13

Thorn (4647) (**skolops**) anything pointed, spec. a stake, thorn. **Friberg** - literally, something pointed stake; as an injurious sharp object splinter, thorn; figuratively, as a sharply painful affliction or disability; idiomatically j. th|/ sarki, literally thorn in the flesh, i.e. serious difficulty, painful trouble, possibly a recurring physical illness, such as malaria (2Co 12.7 = **hapax legomen**) "**Skolops** is something which causes severe pain or constant irritation, probably some bodily infirmity, and is equated by Paul with **astheneia** in 2Co 12:9. **Used 3x in the Septuagint** - Nu 33:55; Ezek. 28:24; Hos. 2:6

Gilbrant - In classical Greek skolops was first used to describe pointed stakes that were arranged around fortifications to impale attackers or were hidden at the bottom of covered pits. They also were used to protect vineyards against thieves. The severed head of an enemy was often hoisted upon a skolops as a sign of triumph. Impaling on a skolops was a means of execution, originally distinct from crucifying, but later, in many cases, identical with it.

In the Septuagint skolops does not refer to a stake but means "sliver" or "thorn." Gentiles who caused suffering among the Israelites are described as a "splinter" in the eye (Numbers 33:55) or as a "pricking brier" or a "painful thorn" (Ezekiel 28:24).

Skolops in the New Testament appears only in 2 Corinthians 12:7 as Paul's famous "thorn in the flesh." Unfortunately, the context does not specifically identify whether the "thorn" is small or large, physical, mental, or spiritual. Scholars have often debated what was meant by the "thorn." Tertullian thought it was an earache; Chrysostom, a headache; and Augustine saw it as a general term for all of Paul's physical sufferings. Others have thought it was an affliction of the eyes. Still others, because of the phrase "messenger of Satan" found in this verse, think the thorn was a false prophet at Corinth who tried to refute the message which Paul preached. Whatever the thorn was, it affected Paul's work, and he prayed for its removal three times (2 Corinthians 12:8). However, Paul soon learned that it was to be permanent and that God could still bless him through it (verses 9f., 12; 13:3). (See also Pinnock, "Thorn in the Flesh," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 4:843.) ([Complete Biblical Library - Incredible Resource](#))

Torment (buffet, harshly treat) (2852) **kolaphizo** from **kolaphos** = the knuckles or a closed fist and **kolapto** = to strike) means to beat or strike with the fist. To strike with clenched hand. Figuratively it means to cause harm, treat roughly or harshly (1Cor 4:11). **Used 5x in NT** - Mt. 26:67 and Mk 14:65 = "beat Him with their fists"; 1Co 4:11; 2Co 12:7; 1Pe 2:20

Exalting (4647)(**huperairo** from **huper** - above + **airo** - lift) means to lift above, elevate, exalt, be conceited, arrogant, insolent (2 Co. 12:7) The only other NT use is in 2 Th 2:4+ describing the Antichrist "who opposes and **exalts** (**huperairo**) himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." **Gilbrant** - The literal idea of lifting or raising something over or beyond some reference point gave rise to figurative uses, both positive and negative. Literally **huperairō** can mean "to raise up, jump over, pass beyond," or "overflow." Figuratively it can mean "to excel, surpass, exceed" (Liddell-Scott). In the Septuagint **huperairō** appears four times (2Chr. 32:23; Ps 38:4; Ps. 72:16; Pr. 31:29), all in a figurative sense. In 2 Chronicles 32:23 the Lord is exalted before all. The Psalmist declares that his sins had risen over his head. The good woman surpasses all other women (Pr 31:29). In the New Testament it appears always in the middle form, **huperairomai**, and always in a negative, figurative sense." ([Complete Biblical Library - Incredible Resource](#))

QUESTION - [What was Paul's thorn in the flesh?](#)

ANSWER - Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12:7. He calls it "a messenger of Satan" that had a purpose of "torment." Many explanations have been put forward, but whether Paul is referring to a physical, spiritual, or emotional affliction—or something else entirely—has never been answered with satisfaction. Since he was not talking of a literal thorn, he must have been speaking metaphorically. Some of the more popular theories of the thorn's interpretation include temptation, a chronic eye problem, malaria, migraines, epilepsy, and a speech disability. Some even say that the thorn refers to a person, such as Alexander the coppersmith, who did Paul "a great deal of harm" (2 Timothy 4:14). No one can say for sure what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, but it was a source of real pain in the apostle's life. Paul clues us in concerning the thorn's purpose: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations." So, God's goal in allowing the thorn in the flesh was to keep Paul humble. Anyone who had encountered Jesus and was commissioned personally by Him (Acts 9:2-8) would, in his natural state, become "puffed up." Add to that the fact that Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write much of the New Testament, and it is easy to see how Paul could become "haughty" (KJV) or "exalted above measure" (NKJV) or "too proud" (NCV).

Paul also says that the affliction came from or by a "messenger of Satan." Just as God allowed Satan to torment Job (Job 1:1-12), God allowed Satan to torment Paul for God's own good purpose.

No one likes to live in pain. Paul sought the Lord three times to remove this source of pain from him (2 Corinthians 12:8). He probably had many good reasons why he should be pain-free: he could have a more effective ministry; he could reach more people with the gospel; he could glorify God even more! But the Lord was more concerned with building Paul's character and preventing pride. Instead of removing the problem, whatever it was, God gave Paul more overwhelming grace and more compensating strength. Paul learned that God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9).

The exact nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh is uncertain. There is probably a good reason that we don't know. God likely wanted Paul's difficulty to be described in general enough terms to apply to any difficulty we may face now. Whether the "thorn" we struggle with today is physical, emotional, or spiritual, we can know that God has a purpose and that His grace is all-sufficient. [GotQuestions.org](#)

2 Corinthians 12:8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

Plummer- About this affliction I three times made supplication to the Lord, praying Him to remove it from me.

- **I implored:** Dt 3:23-27 1Sa 15:11 2Sa 12:16-18 Ps 77:2-11 Mt 20:21,22 Mt 26:39-44 Heb 5:7
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Concerning this - This refers to the irritating thorn in his flesh. He is not referring to the messenger of Satan as some commentaries suggest.

I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me- **Implored** ([parakaleo](#)). Why did he stop at **three times**? In context, it appears that the Lord answered him. It is interesting that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed **three times** that the "cup" might be removed (Mark 14:32-41+)

MacArthur - Implored translates a form of the verb **parakaleō**, which is frequently used in the Gospels by those appealing to Jesus for healing (Matt. 8:5; 14:36; Mark 1:40; 5:23; 6:56; 7:32; 8:22; Luke 7:4; 8:41). Paul was a model of persistence in prayer (cf. Gen. 18:23–32; Matt. 15:22–28; Luke 11:5–10; 18:1; Col. 4:12) as he pleaded with the Lord three times that the thorn might leave him. Though God did not remove Paul's pain, that does not mean that he did not answer Paul's prayer; the answer was simply different from what the apostle had asked for. ([2 Corinthians](#))

John Trapp - "God respecteth not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; not the rhetoric of our prayers, how neat they are; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they are; nor the music of our prayers, how melodious they are; nor the logic of our prayers, how methodical they are; but the divinity of our prayers, how heart-sprung they are. Not gifts, but graces prevail in prayer."

'The Big Sissy!'

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

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

One night during a thunderstorm, a mother was tucking her young son into bed. She was about to turn the light off when he asked in a trembling voice, "Mommy, will you stay with me all night?" The mother gave him a warm, reassuring hug and said tenderly, "I can't, Dear. I have to sleep in Daddy's room." After a brief pause, the boy replied, "The big sissy!"

Let's look beyond the humor of that story for a moment and think about the child's reaction. His fearful plea was understandable. Yet his mother wanted him to learn to trust her even when she wasn't by his side. She loved him, but he misunderstood, for he couldn't see beyond his own fears.

That's the way we often respond to God. We ask for something specific, but He seems to say, "No, I won't do that." Rather than accepting it in faith, we misinterpret His ultimate intention—that we will learn to live through periods of darkness, trusting His Word and not some special sign. Like the apostle Paul, we must realize that we are secure in the promise of His provision, without demanding something more (2 Corinthians 12:9).

As we grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ, we will learn that the best answer to some of our prayers is His gracious no. — Dennis J. DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Plummer- And this was His reply; "It is sufficient for thee that thou hast received grace to become My Apostle and to convert the nations; for it is when man's strength fails that My power is brought to perfection." Most gladly, therefore, I shall prefer glorying in all my weaknesses to asking the Lord to free me from them, so that the power of Christ may spread a sheltering cover over me.

- **My grace is sufficient for you:** 2Co 12:10 3:5,6 Ex 3:11,12 4:10-15 De 33:25-27 Jos 1:9 Isa 43:2 Jer 1:6-9 Mt 10:19,20 Lu 21:15 1Co 10:13 15:10 Col 1:28,29 1Ti 1:14 Heb 4:16
- **for power is perfected in weakness:** Ps 8:2 Isa 35:3,4 40:29-31 41:13-16 Da 10:16-19 Eph 3:16 Php 4:13 Col 1:11 Heb 11:34
- **Most gladly, therefore:** 2Co 12:10,15 Mt 5:11,12
- **I will rather boast:** 2Co 12:5 11:30
- **the power:** 2Ki 2:15 Isa 4:5,6 11:2 Zep 3:17 Mt 28:18,20 1Pe 4:13,14
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- **CLICK HERE FOR IN DEPTH COMMENTS ON THIS VERSE**

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast ([kauchaomai](#)) about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me See the **IN DEPTH COMMENTS**.

Spurgeon - Great tribulation brings out the great strength of God. If you never feel inward conflicts and sinking of soul, you do not know much of the upholding power of God; but if you go down, down, into the depths of soul-anguish till the deep threatens to shut her mouth upon you, and then the Lord rides upon a cherub and does fly, yea, rides upon the wings of the wind and delivers your soul, and catches you away to the third heaven of delight, then you perceive the majesty of divine grace. Oh, there must be the weakness of man, felt, recognized, and mourned over, or else the strength of the Son of God will never be perfected in us."

Adrian Rogers says the best definition of grace that he has ever heard is that God's grace is "both the **desire** and the **ability** to do the will of God." It is striking that almost the same words occur in Php 2:13NLT+ "**For** ([term of explanation](#) - explains how it is possible to Work out our salvation - [Php 2:12+](#)) God is working in you, giving you the **DESIRE** and the **POWER** to do what pleases

Him." When you have a godly desire, that desire is from God, because no good thing can come out of our old vile heart! And only God the Spirit in us can give the supernatural power necessary to accomplish that godly desire! So we could paraphrase Php 2:13, in simple words, by saying that God's Spirit is continually giving us the grace (desire and power) to do what pleases Him! This practical definition of grace ought to free many of us who are "trying to clean ourselves up!" It can't be done! We need His grace to give us the desire to "clean up" and the power to "clean up!" Are you resisting His grace? You can either receive it or resist it! The first way leaves us filled, while the second way leaves us empty, dry, and spiritually barren. O beloved, tell God you desperately need and want Him to pour out His grace on the situation you find yourself entwined. Do you have a root of bitterness? Then confess it (even that act is a reflection of His grace) and cry out for His grace to give you the desire and the ability to eradicate that deadly root and its caustic fruit. And keep crying out until He removes the root, for it is in His will that no child of His should ever have a root of bitterness! And when He removes it, celebrate with a praise and worship service!

We really don't believe God's grace is sufficient until we believe we are insufficient.

We can't receive the sufficiency of God's grace until we know our own insufficiency.

-- [David Guzik](#)

DEVOTIONALS RELATED TO 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

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Always Available

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. —Philippians 4:13

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Swedish hymnist Lina Sandell Berg served with her father in an evangelistic ministry. As they were traveling by ship, he accidentally fell overboard and drowned. In need of the comfort that only God can supply, she wrote the following words that are still sung by Christians around the world:

Day by day
And with each passing moment, Strength I find
To meet my trials here;
Trusting in
My Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause
For worry or for fear.

Secular counselors advise us to draw strength from our own inner resources. But that's hopelessly unrealistic. The simple fact is that in and of ourselves we don't have what it takes to deal with all of life's pressures and problems. Even the strongest among us have weaknesses. We're susceptible to vacillating moods, sinful temptations, and enslaving habits.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, the apostle Paul referred to a weakness he called a "thorn in the flesh." But he didn't tough it out on his own. He prayed for deliverance, but instead he was strengthened by the Lord so that he could endure his overwhelming difficulties.

In times of conflict and defeat, we are forced to confess that we need a source of strength beyond ourselves. And we can rejoice that there's an always-available source on which we can draw—the inexhaustible grace of God. By: Vernon Grounds

When God gives a burden, He always gives the grace to bear it.

Being Or Doing

Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. —2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Rev. Don Berns was 33 when he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1981. Within a few years his voice was too weak to preach, his body trembled uncontrollably, and he faced having to retire from the ministry.

Then after an experimental operation, he was given a dramatic though temporary return to active life. The trembling stopped and he reveled in the restored ability to preach, along with being able to surf and play tennis.

Today, with his physical limitations returning, he says this about his experience: "In all things God does work for the good of those who love him. His power has been made perfect in my weakness. The Lord has now given me a ministry of being, rather than a ministry of doing. God's primary concern for us, as whole persons, begins with our spiritual well-being so we can have a personal, trusting relationship with the One who created us and brings meaning to our lives."

Don Berns' words echo those of the apostle Paul, who suffered with his own "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul realized that God was using his physical weakness to show Himself strong.

In a world that values doing, who we are to God is far more important than anything we do for Him. —David McCasland

Can we think it pleases His loving heart
To cause us a moment's pain?
Ah, no! But He sees through the present cross
The bliss of eternal gain. —Inglor

God often uses bitter experiences to make us better.

The Blessing Of Burdens

Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-9

There's a story about an old grandfather clock that had stood for three generations in the same corner of a room, faithfully ticking off the minutes and hours, day after day. In the clock was a heavy weight that was pulled to the top each night to keep it running.

Then one day the clock was sold, and the new owner noticed the heavy weight. "Too bad," he said, "that such an old clock should have to bear so great a load." So he took the weight off the chain. At once the clock stopped ticking.

"Why did you do that?" asked the clock.

"I wanted to lighten your burden," said the man.

"Please put it back," said the clock. "That's what keeps me going!"

Most people are looking for an easy way through life. They think that if they had no burdens they could live pleasantly and triumphantly. They don't realize that God often keeps us going spiritually by the weights that seem to pull us down. Trials can give our feet spiritual traction. Our burdens not only bring us blessing in this life, but they also are "working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). By: Henry G. Bosch

One day at a time, and the day is His day:
He has numbered its hours, though they haste or delay,
His grace is sufficient; we walk not alone;
As the day, so the strength that He gives to His own!
—Flint

The heavier the load, the better the traction.

Pain's Purpose

No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. —Hebrews 12:11

Today's Scripture: Hebrews 12:7-11

Affliction, when we accept it with patience and humility, can lead us to a deeper, fuller life. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," David wrote, "but now I keep Your Word" (Psalm 119:67). And again, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (v.71).

Pain, far from being an obstacle to our spiritual growth, can actually be the pathway to it. If we allow pain to train us, it can lead us

closer to God and into His Word. It is often the means by which our Father graciously shapes us to be like His Son, gradually giving us the courage, compassion, contentment, and tranquility we long and pray for. Without pain, God would not accomplish all that He desires to do in and through us.

Are you one whom God is instructing through suffering and pain? By His grace, you can endure His instruction patiently (2 Corinthians 12:9). He can make the trial a blessing and use it to draw you into His heart and into His Word. He can also teach you the lessons He intends for you to learn, and give you His peace in the midst of your difficulties.

The Bible tells us, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2). God is making more out of you than you ever thought possible. By: David H. Roper

Through trials we learn to overcome,
Through Christ our victories are won;
Come lay your burdens at His feet
And find this inner peace so sweet. —Halsey

Christ can transform painful trials into glorious triumphs.

Our Prayer; God's Will

I pleaded with the Lord three times that [a thorn in the flesh] might depart from me. —2 Corinthians 12:8

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

The handwritten prayer request was heartbreaking in its seeming impossibility: "Please pray—I have multiple sclerosis, weak muscles, trouble swallowing, increased pain, diminishing sight." The woman's body was breaking down, and I could sense despair in her plea for intercession.

But then came the hope—the strength that trumps the physical damage and degradation: "I know our blessed Savior is in full control. His will is of utmost importance to me."

This person may have needed my prayers, but I needed something she had: unabated confidence in God. She seemed to present a perfect portrait of the truth God taught Paul when he asked for relief from his difficulty—what he called his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). His quest for relief turned out to be not just a seeming impossibility; his request was turned down flat by his heavenly Father. Paul's continual struggle, which was clearly God's will, was a valuable lesson: Through his weakness, God's grace could be displayed and God's strength was "made perfect" (v.9).

As we pour out our hearts to God, let's be even more concerned with seeking His will than we are with receiving the answer we want. That's where the grace and the strength come from. By: Dave Branon

Dear heavenly Father, I bring to You my petitions, but I give to You my heart. While I plead for You to answer my prayers, I also submit to Your will so that my heart may be strengthened and Your work be done.

We pray not to obtain our will in heaven, but to effect God's will on earth.

The Crooked Steeple

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture & Insight: 2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Turns out that crooked church steeples make people nervous. When we visited some friends, they shared how, after a fierce windstorm, their church's proud steeple was crooked, causing some alarm.

Of course, the church quickly repaired the flagging spire, but the humorous image got me thinking. Often church is seen as a place where everything is expected to look perfect; it's not seen as a place where we can show up crooked. Right?

But in a fallen, broken world, all of us are "crooked," each with our own collection of natural weaknesses. We might be tempted to keep our vulnerabilities under wraps, but Scripture encourages the opposite attitude. In 2 Corinthians 12, for example, Paul suggests that it's in our weaknesses—for him, an unnamed struggle he calls a "thorn in my flesh" (v. 7)—that Christ is most likely to reveal His power. Jesus had told Paul, "My power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). So Paul concluded, "For Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (v. 10).

We may not like our imperfections, but hiding them only denies Jesus's power to work within those aspects of ourselves. When we invite Jesus into the crooked places in us, He gently mends and redeems in ways our effort could never accomplish. By: Adam R. Holz

What are some of the "crooked" places in your life? In what ways have you seen God work through your imperfections?

Invite Jesus into your imperfections for His mending.

Sharing Your Faith

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture & Insight: 2 Corinthians 12:5–10

When author and evangelist Becky Pippert lived in Ireland, she longed to share the good news of Jesus with Heather, who'd done her nails for two years. But Heather hadn't seemed remotely interested. Feeling unable to start a conversation, Becky prayed before her appointment.

While Heather worked on her nails, Becky flipped through an old magazine and paused at a picture of one of the models. When Heather asked why she was so riveted, Becky told her the photograph was of a close friend who'd years before been a Vogue cover model. Becky shared some of her friend's story of coming to faith in God, which Heather listened to with rapt attention.

Becky left for a trip, and later when she returned to Ireland, she learned that Heather had moved to a new location. Becky reflected, "I had asked God to provide an opportunity to share the gospel, and He did!"

Becky looked to God for help in her weakness, inspired by the apostle Paul. When Paul was weak and pleaded with God to remove the thorn in his flesh, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul had learned to rely on God in all things—the big and the small.

When we depend on God to help us love those around us, we too will find opportunities to share our faith authentically. By: Amy Boucher Pye

When has God helped you to share your faith with someone? How could you pray for someone today whom you wish would come to know God?

Loving Jesus, You work through my weaknesses to bring glory to Your Father. Move in my life today, that I might share Your good news of grace.

Peacocks And Their Kin

My strength is made perfect in weakness. — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Male peacocks are resplendent creatures with iridescent blue-green plumage and elongated trains tipped with "eyes" colored in hues of gold, red, and blue. They are strikingly beautiful birds, but they have ugly feet!

To be honest, most of us have some type of physical limitation. It may be something we've borne all our lives or one we've recently acquired.

Paul described his deficiency as a "thorn in the flesh" that kept him humble (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Three times he asked the Lord to remove it, probably thinking that he could then serve God better. But the Lord assured him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul replied, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

One of the ironies of faith is that God often chooses us to accomplish His most important tasks despite our imperfections, not because of our speaking ability, looks, or fitness for the task. Missionary Hudson Taylor said, "God was looking for someone weak enough to use, and he found [you and me]!" When we find our strength in Him, He can use us in ways we could never imagine (v.9). By: David H. Roper

Lord, I have many weaknesses. Please show Your strength through me by using me in whatever way You please. May others see You at work in me and

praise Your name. Amen.

God's strength is best seen in our weakness.

Avenue To Power

I will . . . boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. —2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

When Tarah was in high school, she had a growing fear that she would someday battle a serious illness. So she began to pray—asking God to spare her from this imagined illness. Then she reached a turning point in her thinking, and she yielded her future to God no matter what.

Years later, Tarah's doctor found a cancerous tumor, which was successfully treated with chemotherapy. Tarah says that because she had entrusted her future to God, she was ready when the disease came. Her problem became an avenue for God's strength.

This idea of surrendering to God can be seen in Paul's life as well. His surrender came after the problem—"a thorn in the flesh"—had developed (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul prayed repeatedly about this difficulty, pleading for the Lord to take it from him. But God responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (v.9). Understanding this, Paul adopted a positive view: "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong" (vv.9-10).

In facing our fears and struggles, it's vital that we yield totally to God. When we do, God can use our problems as an avenue for His power. By: Dennis Fisher

Whenever life's burdens oppress you
And trials are too much to face,
Remember God's strength in your weakness;
He'll give you His power and grace. —Sper

Wielding our power is no substitute for yielding our will to God's power.

Golden Scars

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 2 Corinthians 11:30

Today's Scripture & Insight: 2 Corinthians 12:1–10

In the Netherlands, a group of fashion designers offer a "Golden Joinery" workshop. Inspired by the Japanese technique Kintsugi, where broken porcelain is visibly repaired with gold, participants collaborate in mending clothes in ways that highlight the mending work rather than trying to mask it. Those who are invited bring "a dear but broken garment and mend it with gold." As they remake their clothes, the repair becomes ornamental, a "golden scar."

Articles of clothing are transformed in ways that highlight the places where they were torn or frayed. Perhaps this is something like what Paul meant when he said that he would "boast" in the things that showed his weakness. Although he'd experienced "surpassingly great revelations," he doesn't brag about them (2 Corinthians 12:6). He is kept from getting proud and overconfident, he says, by a "thorn" in his flesh (v. 7). No one knows exactly what he was referring to—perhaps depression, a form of malaria, persecution from enemies, or something else. Whatever it was, he begged God to take it away. But God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9).

Just as the rips and tears in old clothes can become sights of beauty as they're remade by designers, the broken and weak places in our lives can become places where God's power and glory may shine. He holds us together, transforms us, and makes our weaknesses beautiful. By: Amy Peterson

What are some weaknesses you try to keep hidden from the world? How has God revealed His power through your weakness?

God, may all my scars become golden as You heal and repair me in ways that bring glory to Your name.

A Good Stretch

My strength is made perfect in weakness. —2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: Romans 8:26-28

Physical therapy is a painful necessity after knee-replacement surgery. Part of my routine involved my therapist pulling my knee back into a bent position and holding it taut. "Good stretch?" Mason would ask encouragingly. "No," I winced, "not that good!"

I soon learned, however, how important it is to stretch one's muscles and joints—sometimes causing discomfort—to gain full range of motion.

That wasn't the first time I've been "stretched" outside my comfort zone. God has sometimes urged me to share my faith with someone I didn't know very well, or to give an offering that was far beyond what I usually give, or to confront someone about a situation.

Abraham's life illustrates the importance of faith when God asks us to move beyond our comfort zone. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called . . . He went out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8).

While we stretch our spiritual muscles, we may feel discomfort. But God assures us, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Our adequacy—our sufficiency—is found in Him (3:5).

When you boldly step out in faith and obedience to God, you may be surprised at how a "good stretch" can strengthen your spiritual life! By: Cindy Hess Kasper

To stretch our faith, to take the risk,
God says we will succeed
If we but ask Him for the strength
And grace that we will need. —D. De Haan

Our faith is stretched by exchanging our weakness for God's strength.

Tensile Strength

My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

When a new highway loop was being completed in West Michigan, a real danger was discovered. The bridges had been designed to bear their own weight—but not the traffic they were intended to carry. Before the highway could be opened, several bridges had to be re-engineered and rebuilt.

Engineers have to be especially concerned with the tensile strength of the material in their construction plans for structures that are required to bear large amounts of stress due to weight. Tensile strength is the maximum amount of stretching a material can withstand before it tears. If the engineer miscalculates, the structure may collapse under the pressure.

When we are under the weight of stress and hardship, we may wonder whether our Lord, who engineered us, has miscalculated our personal "tensile strength." We are certain that we are going to collapse under the weight of the trials, but our Designer knows exactly what we can handle by His grace. He knows our limits and will never permit more than we can bear. As Bible teacher Ron Hutchcraft said, "God may send a load, but He never sends an overload!"

Reinforced by the steel of God's provision, our tensile strength won't fail. By: Bill Crowder

Wait on the Lord from day to day,
Strength He provides in His own way;
There's no need for worry, no need to fear,
He is our God who is always near. —Fortna

Your problems can never exhaust God's provisions.

The Strongest Weak People

Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. —2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

If there is anything that we love to hate more than the arrogance of others, it would have to be an awareness of our own weakness. We detest it so much that we invent ways to cover our personal inadequacy.

Even the apostle Paul needed to be reminded of his own frailty. He was jabbed time and again by a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). He didn’t tell us what the thorn was, but author J. Oswald Sanders reminds us that “it hurt, humiliated, and restricted Paul.” Three times he pleaded with the Lord to take it away, but his request was not granted. Instead, he used his thorn to tap into God’s all-sufficient grace. The Lord promised, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (v.9).

Courageously, Paul began to “own” his weakness and put the Lord’s grace to the test, a pathway that Sanders calls “a gradual educative process” in the apostle’s life. Sanders notes that eventually Paul no longer regarded his thorn as a “limiting handicap” but as a “heavenly advantage.” And his advantage was this: When he was weak in himself, he was strong in the Lord.

As we accept our weaknesses, in Christ we can be strong weak people. By: Joanie Yoder

May the Word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power. —Wilkinson

God's strength is seen best in our weakness.

Serving With Limitations

My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. —2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: Hebrews 11:8-19

When he was not yet 4 years old, Itzhak Perlman was stricken by polio, making him unable to use his legs. But he compensated for that loss by devoting himself to his violin. In the years that followed, he delighted multitudes of people with his music. He lost the use of his legs but his music gave him wings. What an inspiring example of devotion!

Some of God’s servants have shown a similar devotion to their Lord. They have suffered the loss of certain abilities but have been inspired to develop other capacities for service. For example, when William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, discovered that he was going blind, he did not surrender to despair. With a positive outlook, he told his colleagues that he had served Christ while he could see, and he would do his utmost to serve Him even when blind.

What motivates Christians to keep on serving and following Jesus to the best of their ability despite loss or hardship? Like Abraham, we live by faith. We look beyond this life and wait “for the city . . . whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). It’s “a better . . . heavenly country” (v.16).

May the Holy Spirit empower us to glorify Christ—no matter what our limitations. By: Vernon Grounds

Give me, Savior, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy trust to keep;
And so through trouble, care, and strife,
Glorify Thee in my daily life. —Bell

Circumstances that imprison us cannot limit God's work through us.

Good Riddance!

My grace is sufficient for you. —2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

A shredder ate hundreds of pieces of paper and other items in New York City on December 28 last year. Organizers of the second annual “Good Riddance Day” encouraged people to bring to Times Square their bad memories and suffering of 2008 and feed them into the industrial-strength shredder or toss them into an extra-large dumpster.

Some participants shredded pieces of paper with the words “the stock market” or “cancer.” Others destroyed bank statements, and one person shredded a printed e-mail from a boyfriend who broke up with her.

We long to “shred” memories of bad things that others have done to us or difficult circumstances we’re going through. The apostle Paul wanted relief from his present suffering, an infirmity that made him feel weak (2 Cor. 12:7-10). But God said to him, “My grace

is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” God didn’t take away the problem. Instead, He gave Paul the grace to live with it.

Difficulties burden us as we mull them over in our minds, affecting our relationships and our outlook on life. We as believers in Christ have a place to take these burdens. First Peter 5:7 tells us, “[Cast] all your care upon [the Lord], for He cares for you.” By: Anne Cetas

Whenever life’s burdens oppress you
And trials seem too much to face,
Remember God’s strength in your weakness;
He’ll give you His power and grace.
—Sper

God gives enough grace for whatever we face.

The Advantage Of Weakness

He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." —2 Corinthians 12:9

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

It is always a joy to talk with my old college friend Tom and get caught up on what the Lord has been teaching us since we last met.

One time Tom began with a sheepish grin, “You know, I can’t believe how many years it’s taken me to learn my latest lesson—and I’m a Bible teacher!” He went on to list some of the trials and testings he and his family had been facing and how unworthy he felt teaching an adult Sunday school class. “Week after week I felt I was a total failure,” he confided, “and kept wondering if this might be my last Sunday before announcing my resignation.”

Then one Sunday Tom noticed a young woman who stayed behind to speak to him. She was a friend of his family, so she knew what they had been going through. “Tom,” she said, “I hope you won’t take this the wrong way, but you’re a much better teacher when you’re going through tough times!”

Another sheepish grin crept across Tom’s face as he told me, “Only then did I feel I grasped the Lord’s response to Paul’s thorn in the flesh: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’”

Weakness helps us to relate to others and lets God’s power work in our lives. That may be our greatest asset. By: Joanie Yoder

Inadequate but mighty—
How strange, yet wholly true;
Weak ones endowed with power
The Lord's great work shall do.
—HGB

We may face situations beyond our reserves, but never beyond God's resources.

More Than A Conqueror

We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. —Romans 8:37

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Fanny Crosby, composer of thousands of songs, was truly “more than a conqueror.” When she was only 6 weeks old, faulty treatment of an eye infection resulted in lifelong blindness. By age 8, having fought and won over discouragement, she wrote this poem:

Oh, what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world contented I shall be.
How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot—and I won't!

Instead of weeping and sighing, Fanny Crosby dedicated her blindness to God. Out of her rich Christian experience she composed numerous gospel hymns. In her testimonial song “Blessed Assurance,” she seemed to forget that she was blind. Phrases like “Visions of rapture now burst on my sight” or “Watching and waiting, looking above” expressed what she called “a foretaste of glory

divine.”

Do you long to know and apply her secret? Consider this: While many of us seek Christ for what we can get, Fanny Crosby sought Christ for what she could become through Him—more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37). Even through times of extreme distress, God’s grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9), and He is lovingly working to make us more like His Son.

We all need to ask ourselves: Is our Christian life about getting or becoming? By: Joanie Yoder

Seek Christ not for what you can get but for what you can become.

Weaknesses And Strengths

Out of weakness [they] were made strong. — Hebrews 11:34

Today’s Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

I’m always amused when I watch the loons lift into flight off Piatt Lake in Michigan’s upper peninsula. They half-run, half-flap across the water for hundreds of feet before getting enough speed to lift into the air. I wondered why until I learned that unlike most birds, loons have solid bones. Their added weight makes it difficult for them to get airborne.

I also learned that loons are clumsy on land because their legs are set farther back on their bodies than other birds. Walking is so difficult that many loons simply scoot across land to their nesting places. But these disadvantages—heavy bones, legs set far back—are also tremendous advantages. Because of their weight and leg placement, loons can dive deeper, farther, and faster. This is essential for catching fish and escaping predators.

What we see as disadvantages in our lives can be turned into advantages, and apparent weaknesses can be transformed into strengths. That was true of the apostle Paul, whose “thorn in the flesh” became an opportunity for God’s strength to be seen in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Is a weakness holding you down? Is it shyness or a physical limitation? Ask God to turn it into a strength for His glory. By: David C. Egner

Inadequate but mighty—
How strange, yet wholly true!
Weak persons filled with power
The Father’s work shall do.
—HGB

Our limited potential accents God’s limitless power.

Thanks For Thorns

I take pleasure in infirmities, . . . in distresses, for Christ’s sake. —2 Corinthians 12:10

Today’s Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

To give thanks in every situation is sometimes very difficult. When your body is wracked with pain, or you have just learned that you have a physical problem for which there is no cure, or you have lost your job, or a cherished relationship has been broken, it’s hard to feel grateful. But we can learn to thank God because He gives us strength when we feel weak.

That’s why Paul could say, “I take pleasure in infirmities, . . . in distresses, for Christ’s sake” (2 Corinthians 12:10). And as believers, we can be grateful that through such experiences God is accomplishing what is best for us. Even through our suffering, He is working for our good (Romans 8:28).

Scottish author and preacher George Matheson (1842-1906), who was blind, expressed this prayer: “I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my ‘thorn’ Teach me the glory of my cross; teach me the value of my ‘thorn.’ Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made my rainbow.”

As we surrender ourselves to the Lord and remember that He is working in everything to accomplish our ultimate good, we can thank Him even when we are pierced by “thorns.” By: Richard DeHaan

We can give thanks in everything
And say, “Your will be done,”

For God's at work in everything
To make us like His Son.
—D. De Haan

It's easier to bear the burden of suffering when we carry it with gratitude.

Mixed Reviews

If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. — 2 Corinthians 11:30

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:16-30

Several years ago The New York Times reported that coyotes were repopulating much of the American East. But they were getting mixed reviews. Some people saw them as a threat to domestic animals and regarded them as a nuisance. Others found the coyotes beneficial. One farmer said, "We're happy to have them. The coyotes kill the mice and rabbits, which gnaw at the bottom of our trees."

In the same way that people see the coyote as either a friend or an enemy, we have a choice about how we are going to view the sharp-toothed people and adverse circumstances of our lives. We recognize the danger they pose, but do we see how we can benefit from their presence? We can decide to let their threats drive us to the Lord. Then, even though they seem to be working against us, they are actually working for our good.

The apostle Paul trained himself to view the perils of his life as opportunities to express his faithfulness to Christ. He came to the place where he could "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Father, help us to see opportunities for growth where others see only problems. By: Mart DeHaan

The obstacles that we must face
Along life's rocky way
Are used by God so we might hear
"Well done" from Him someday. —Sper

When we keep our eyes on Christ, obstacles become opportunities.

Banged Up But Better

I take pleasure in infirmities For when I am weak, then I am strong. —2 Corinthians 12:10

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:24-12:10

Some people are like my little gray Plymouth Horizon. They just keep getting banged up.

In the 5 years I've had this compact car, it's been to the body shop four times. Some cars go their whole life without a trip to the fender-fixers, but this one just can't seem to stay away. On separate occasions, three corners of my vehicle have been crunched. And just recently one corner got its second bonk.

In one sense, this little runaround car is better off for its smashing successes. It has lots of parts that are not 5 years old, making portions of the car newer than its chronological age.

According to James 1:2-4, people who seem to get "banged up" more than others may be better off for it. Although none of us would ask for trouble or desire it, Scripture indicates that our struggles make us stronger.

Look at Paul's example in 2 Corinthians 11. He listed the many bad things that had come his way as he served God. Then in chapter 12 he mentioned the "thorn in the flesh" that afflicted him. Paul wasn't complaining. He was pointing out that God's strength stands out best when we are weakest.

Like Paul, when we get banged up, let's look for the ways God has made us better. By: Dave Branon

The work of God transforms us
And makes us like His Son;
He works through trials and testings
Until our life is done. —Sper

God allows trials in our lives, not to impair us but to improve us.

Plenty Of Pencils

When I am weak, then I am strong. —2 Corinthians 12:10

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

My mother lives alone now. It's been 8 years since my dad died. She can't get out by herself except to take brief walks. She's having a terrible time with her short-term memory. Conversations are limited to a few repeated comments.

Yet she told me something profound. She said, "I was thinking the other day about my troubles, and I decided that I don't have anything to complain about. God's taking care of me and I've got people who are helping. My only trouble is that I can't remember anything, and I've got plenty of pencils and paper to write everything down."

The apostle Paul struggled with what he called "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). But he found that in his weakness he experienced "the power of Christ" (v.9). He said, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake" (v.10).

All of us have struggles. They may be related to age, finances, relationships, or a myriad of other difficulties. But if we truly set our heart to trusting God, and if we stay thankful even in the midst of our troubles, we'll be more likely to acknowledge that we "don't have anything to complain about." By: Dave Branon

Even in my darkest hour
The Lord will bless me with His power;
His loving grace will surely abound,
In His sweet care I shall be found.
—Brandt

As you go through life, concentrate on the roses instead of the thorns.

Strength In Weakness

When I am weak, then I am strong. —2 Corinthians 12:10

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:1-13

After the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building in 1995, Billy Graham addressed the grieving citizens. Mrs. Frank Keating, the governor's wife, later recalled, "As he sat on the platform before his message, I saw a man with physical weakness. But when he stood up to speak, there was energy and vitality. And when he sat down, he was again a man of weakness."

George Müller, 19th-century pastor and orphanage director, said this about weakness: "Our weakness gives opportunity for the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to be manifested. That blessed One never leaves and never forsakes us. The greater the weakness, the nearer He is to manifest His strength; the greater our necessities, the more have we ground to rely on it that He will prove Himself our Friend. This has been my experience for more than 70 years; the greater the trial, the greater the difficulty, the nearer the Lord's help. . . . Therefore our business is just to pour out our hearts before Him; and help in His own time and way is sure to come."

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:10 are a paradox. Although we can't explain it, we can experience it. With God, our weakness becomes our greatest strength. By: Dennis J. DeHaan

through us,
His power we will see. —Sper

The greatest barrier between us and God is our own supposed strength.

The Secret Of Strength

When I am weak, then I am strong. —2 Corinthians 12:10

Today's Scripture: Hebrews 11:32-40

If there's anything we tend to despise, it's weakness. Strength, on the other hand, is regarded as praiseworthy. But the apostle Paul

made a puzzling statement: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

How could he say that? He learned that when his own strength gave out and his personal resources of energy and wisdom were depleted, he had to rely completely on God’s inexhaustible grace. When he did that, his experience was like that of a traveler in the desert, who tosses aside his bone-dry canteen because he has come to an oasis with an abundant supply of crystal-pure water.

Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, knew the secret of strength through weakness. Complimented once by a friend on the impact of the mission, Hudson answered, “It seemed to me that God looked over the whole world to find a man who was weak enough to do His work, and when He at last found me, He said, ‘He is weak enough—he’ll do.’ All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them.”

Have we learned the secret of abandoning our utterly inadequate self-sufficiency in order to draw on the resources of God’s unlimited power? By: Vernon Grounds

God uses weakness to reveal
His great sufficiency,
So if we let Him work through us,
His power we will see. —Sper

To experience God's strength, we must recognize our weakness.

Difficult People

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. — 2 Cor. 12:10

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

I haven’t always appreciated every member of the churches I pastored. Early in my ministry one man berated me in front of a group of people for my deep and dull sermons. A week later a deacon said my sermons were interesting but too simple—like little Sunday school lessons.

At the time I didn’t thank God for those cantankerous people. Nor did I thank the Lord for the person who disheartened our new assistant organist by placing an anonymous note on the organ criticizing her makeup.

I have learned, though, that I can appreciate and even show love to people who irritate me.

As I read the words of the apostle Paul in his letters to the Corinthians, I find him expressing both deep hurt and powerful love. He received unjust criticism from several people in Corinth (2 Cor. 10:10), yet he continued to minister to them. He knew that difficult people, like difficult situations, teach us to rely on the Lord and to allow Him to show His power at work in our lives (12:9-10).

Over the years, the Lord has helped me to show love to those who have irritated me. Many have become my friends. Dealing with difficult people will never be easy for us, but through the Spirit’s power we can do it. By: Herbert Vander Lugt

Thinking It Over

How do you respond when someone criticizes you?
Why is it so hard to respond with love and patience?
How does Matthew 5:43-48 apply to these situations?

The worst criticism against you can bring out the best in you.

For His Sake

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. —2 Corinthians 12:10

Today's Scripture: Acts 14:1-7,19

I remember a time when my children were young and my wife was in bed with a stubborn case of the flu. I was trying to fill in for her the best I could, but the kids weren’t cooperating. Even though I spent a lot of time playing with them, they seemed determined to fill the house with more noise and mess than I could tolerate. Why couldn’t they calm down and do more to help? I wondered why they couldn’t be more considerate for their mother’s sake—and for my sake?

Then I thought about my relationship with God. Do I treat Him the way my kids were treating me? He must be grieved at times by my insensitivity to His concerns.

Later I began looking up every passage of Scripture that mentions doing something for the Lord's sake, doing what we know pleases Him. I read about Paul, Peter, and Stephen—men who put their lives on the line for Christ's sake. For them that phrase was a way of life, not just empty words. On one occasion, the apostle Paul was even stoned and left for dead because he dared to proclaim the gospel (Acts 14:19).

I wonder how much of what I do and say is for my Lord and Savior's sake? That's a good question for all of us to ponder. By: Mart DeHaan

Your mission as a Christian is to take
The cross of Christ and do His perfect will;
To love and serve the Lord for Jesus' sake—
You have no higher purpose to fulfill. —Hess

Jesus gave His all for us—are we giving our all for Him?

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Plummer- That is why I am so well pleased with weaknesses, such as wanton injuries, dire hardships, persecutions, and desperate straits, when they are endured for Christ's sake. For it is just when, in myself I am utterly weak that in Him I am truly strong.

- **Therefore I am well content** : 2Co 1:4 4:8-10,17 7:4 Ac 5:41 Ro 5:3 8:35-39 Php 1:29 2:17,18 Col 1:24 Jas 1:2 1Pe 1:6,7 4:13,14
- **with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties**: 2Co 11:23-30
- **for Christ's**: 2Co 4:5,11 10:18 Lu 6:22 Joh 15:21 1Co 4:10 Rev 2:3
- **for when**: 2Co 12:9 13:4,9 Eph 6:10
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- **CLICK HERE FOR IN DEPTH COMMENTS ON THIS VERSE**

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong See the in depth comments

2 Corinthians 12:11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

- **become**: 2Co 1:6 2Co 11:1,16,17
- **for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles** 2Co 12:12 11:5 1Co 3:4-7,22 Ga 2:6-14
- **though**: Lu 17:10 1Co 3:7 15:8-10 Eph 3:8
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Resources:

2 Corinthians 11:1; 16; 17 I wish that you would bear with me in a little **foolishness**; but indeed you are bearing with me. 16 Again I say, let no one think me **foolish**; but if you do, receive me even as **foolish**, so that I also may boast a little. 17 What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in **foolishness**, in this confidence of boasting.

2 Corinthians 3:1-3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? 2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15+ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their

deeds.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 For **I am the least of the apostles**, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but **I labored even more than all of them**, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

CORINTHIANS SHOULD HAVE DEFENDED PAUL

Utley - Paul uses biting sarcasm in 2Co 12:11, 13, 15 as he did in 2Co 11:4–5, 7, 19–21+.

I have become (perfect tense - his state) **foolish** ([aphron](#)); **you yourselves compelled** ([anagkazo](#)) **me** - NIV = "I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you." **I** (ego) is emphatic. The [Textus Receptus](#) adds a phrase "a fool in glorying" but it is not present in the more modern Greek manuscripts. The "**foolish**" behavior of the Corinthians had forced Paul to become "**foolish**" is writing commendation about himself, something he absolutely abhorred. In short, Paul felt **foolish** in being forced to boast in his apostolic credentials. Why was he **compelled**? The Corinthians were *silent* when they should have been *supportive*, and the situation was crucial because the error (and the influence of the error) of the false apostles (cf 2Co 11:4+) would eventually "lead them astray (morally and/or spiritually corrupt) from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." (2Co 11:3+) Paul had to act to defend his apostleship and take a stand for truth.

David Guzik on **I have become foolish** - Since he began this section in 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul was forced to boast more than he wanted to before the Corinthian Christians. Paul is almost apologizing for writing so much about himself, because he would much rather write about Jesus.

MacArthur - The false apostles had their deceptive letters of commendation, but the Corinthians themselves were Paul's letter of commendation (2Co 3:2). What made their failure to defend him all the more inexcusable was that the Corinthians knew that the allegations against Paul were false. They had observed his life during his ministry among them (Acts 18:11) and knew that he was above reproach. To be silent when aspersions are cast on the lives and ministries of godly men is to share in the guilt of their detractors. ([2 Corinthians](#))

Utley on **I have become foolish** - This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. Some faction (1 Cor. 1–4) or some group of itinerant false teachers (10–13) had attacked Paul, his leadership, his authority, his style of speaking, and the gospel. So, Paul had to defend himself. He did this in several ways. (1) compared his life with theirs (2) used their style of rhetoric, but with humility (3) used sarcasm to make his points

Actually I should have been commended ([sunistemi](#)) **by you** - The NLT says "You ought to be writing commendations for me." Why should they have **commended** Paul the apostle? He had been their spiritual father (1Co 4:15+) and had dwelt among them for 18 months (Acts 18:11), so they should have known his character and his integrity and that his reputation was spotless and above reproach. They were his letters of commendation (2Co 3:1-3+) and should have been able to refute the false teachers.

Why should they have **commended** Paul? Because as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:2 "If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord."

For in no (absolutely not one) **respect was I inferior** ([hustereo](#)) **to the most eminent** ([huperlian](#) - "super") **apostles** ([apostolos](#)) - Paul knew himself. He knew who he was in Christ. He knew he was nothing but a seed that had fallen into the ground and died and that God was the One bearing much fruit (Jn 12:24, Gal 2:20). And so he makes the "boast" that he was absolutely in no way the inferior of these so-called "super apostles" (Pauline sarcasm - for this is what these false teachers claimed to be) for they were men filled with self and the wrong spirit and not filled with the Spirit (they were false apostles - 2Co 11:13+).

Barton on the super **apostles** - They claimed to be servants of Christ, but they refused to face suffering, indignities, and hardship for Christ's sake. (See how Paul compared himself to them in (2Co 11:23-27.) They were more concerned about their money and their reputation than about Christ (2Co 2:17; 3:1). ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Even though I am a nobody - Paul was being sincere, not [self-deprecating](#). He knew the weaker the vessel, the greater the grace (cf 2Co 4:7). In his first letter Paul stated "I am the least of the apostles." (1Co 15:9) Of course that declaration referred to genuine apostles, not these false "super apostles." In his letter to the Ephesians (written about 6 years later) he considered himself the "very least of all the saints" (Eph 3:8+). And finally in 1Ti 1:15 (about 10 years later than First Corinthians), he said that among sinners he was "foremost." The more Paul grew in Christlikeness, the lower he saw himself (cf Jn 3:30), so it was in that sense that he considered himself to be a "nobody," even though he would prove to be the greatest of all the apostles in terms of contribution to the canon of the NT.

Foolish (878) **aphron** from **a** = without + **phren** = understanding, means originally meant diaphragm and was regarded as the seat of mental and spiritual activity, then mind or understanding) is literally a lack of sense, reflection, understanding or reason. **Aphron** is one who does not use his rational powers. **Aphron** describes one not employing his understanding especially as it relates to practical matters. It means lack of good judgment and can refer to folly in action. 10v in NT - Lk. 11:40; Lk. 12:20; Rom. 2:20; 1 Co. 15:36; 2 Co. 11:16; 2 Co. 11:19; 2 Co. 12:6; 2 Co. 12:11; Eph. 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:15

Compelled (force) (315) **anagkazo** from **anagke** - compelling need requiring immediate action) refers to an inner or outer compulsion for someone to act in a certain manner (Gal 2:3, 14, 6:12, Acts 26:11), and to do so with a sense of urgency (as a pressing necessity). **Anagkazo** conveys the idea of to urge strongly in Mt 14:23. It conveys the idea of an inward feeling of obligation in Acts 28:19. This word was used in surgery of force to reduce dislocations, etc. (Liddell-Scott). Matt. 14:22; Mk. 6:45; Lk. 14:23; Acts 26:11; Acts 28:19; 2 Co. 12:11; Gal. 2:3; Gal. 2:14; Gal. 6:12

Commended (4921) **sunistemi/sunistao** from **sún** = together with + **hístemi** = set, place, stand) means literally to set, place or put together. When one brings together a person with another person, it is a way of presenting or introducing them. This gives **sunistemi** the meaning of **commend**, which means to recommend as worthy of confidence (the implication being that others adopt a similar attitude) or to present to one's acquaintance for favorable notice. (9/16 NT uses) - Lk. 9:32; Rom. 3:5; Rom. 5:8; Rom. 16:1; 2 Co. 3:1; 2 Co. 4:2; 2 Co. 5:12; 2 Co. 6:4; 2 Co. 7:11; 2 Co. 10:12; 2 Co. 10:18; 2 Co. 12:11; Gal. 2:18; Col. 1:17; 2 Pet. 3:5

Inferior (come short of) (5302) **hustereo** from **hústeros** = last, latter, terminal, hindmost) has the basic meaning of come to late (in time) or to come after (in terms of space) and thus it means to fail in something, come short of, miss, not to reach. **Hustereo** has the basic meaning of being last or inferior. It means to be left behind in the race and so fail to reach the goal, to fall short of the end, to lack. It means to come late or too tardily.

Eminent (5344) **huperlian** from **huper** = above + **lian** = very exceedingly) is an adverb that refers to an excessive degree of anything. Characterized by being beyond an extreme degree. **Huperlian** is used only in 2Co 11:5 and 2Co 12:11.

Gilbrant - The Textus Receptus reads **huper lian**. The confusion arises because ancient scribes did not place any spaces between words in their manuscripts. The only other occurrence of **huperlian** in Greek literature is in a 12th-century A.D. work. **Huperlian** means "exceedingly, chief" and is used as an adjective in its two New Testament appearances. Paul referred to the "very chiefest apostles" ("super-apostles," NIV) who had come to Corinth. There may have been a note of sarcasm in Paul's tone when he referred to these men....Paul said that these men preach a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel (2Co 11:4); and he called them "false apostles ... masquerading as apostles of Christ" (2Co 11:13NIV). These were false teachers who boasted of their spiritual status, whom Paul felt the need to challenge. He also was a Jew (11:22); he also had suffered (11:23-33); he also had received visions (12:1-10). The Corinthians were being seduced by these "super-apostles," and Paul resisted them. ([Complete Biblical Library - Incredible Resource](#))

Apostles (652) **apostolos** from **apo** = from + **stello** = send forth) means one sent forth from by another, often with a special commission to represent another and to accomplish his work. It can be a delegate, commissioner, ambassador sent out on a mission or orders or commission and with the authority of the one who sent him. **Apostolos** referred to someone who was officially commissioned to a position or task, such as an envoy. Cargo ships were sometimes called *apostolic*, because they were dispatched with a specific shipment for a specific destination. In secular Greek **apostolos** was used of an admiral of a fleet sent out by the king on special assignment. But the term is primarily used as a specific and unique title for the thirteen men (the Twelve, with Matthias replacing Judas, and Paul) whom Christ personally chose and commissioned to authoritatively proclaim the gospel and lead the early church. The thirteen apostles not only were all called directly by Jesus but all were witnesses of His resurrection, Paul having encountered Him on the Damascus Road after His ascension. Those thirteen apostles were given direct revelation of God's Word to proclaim authoritatively, the gift of healing, and the power to cast out demons (Mt 10:1+). By these signs their teaching authority was verified (cf. 2Co 12:12+). Their teachings became the foundation of the church (Ep 2:20+), and their authority extended beyond local bodies of believers to the entire believing world.

2 Corinthians 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

- 2Co 4:2 2Co 6:4-10 2Co 11:4,6 Ro 15:18-19 1Co 1:5-7 1Co 9:2 1Co 14:18
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

2 Corinthians 4:2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth (THE TRUE GOSPEL, TRUE SIGNS AND WONDERS AND MIRACLES) commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Corinthians 6:4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much **endurance** ([hupomone](#)), in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

2 Corinthians 11:6 But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way (INCLUDING SIGNS AND WONDERS AND MIRACLES) we have made this evident to you in all things.

SIGNS OF A TRUE APOSTLE

The signs ([semeion](#)) of a *true* apostle were performed among you - The signs of a *true* apostle (*true* is added by translation but not in Greek) should have clearly demonstrated to the Corinthians that Paul was a *true* apostle and not a false apostle like his opponents. **Were performed** is divine passive, indicating that Paul saw the signs as not from himself but from God. This is another reason the Corinthians should not have kept silent but [should have commended and defended him!](#) Jesus' ministry, like Paul's, was authenticated by all kinds of miracles (Acts 2:22) The clear implication is that the false apostles had not been allowed by God (He is sovereign over Satan's deceiving tricks) to perform any authenticating **signs** ([semeion](#)). We know they were Satan's "men" and theoretically could come into Corinth with "with all power and signs and false wonders" (2Th 2:9) We know they came "with all the deception of wickedness," preaching another Jesus and another Gospel" (2Cor 11:4), "disguising themselves as servants of righteousness" (2Co 11:15) just like their spiritual father Satan (2Co 11:14).

With all perseverance ([hupomone](#)) - **ESV** = "with utmost patience." **Perseverance** has to do with circumstances and indicates Paul carried these signs out with steadfast endurance in face of difficult circumstances and continued stiff opposition. Paul's perseverance is another evidence that he was a Spirit filled man for later he wrote that it is "God Who gives **perseverance** ([hupomone](#))." (Ro 15:5, cf Col 1:11). We know that in his initial attempts to present the Gospel of Jesus in the synagogue, the Jews "resisted and blasphemed" (Acts 18:6+, cf Jn 15:18-21, 16:2, cf Paul's words in 1Co 15:31) The implication is that the Corinthians were slow to accept, receive or understand Paul was truly an envoy sent from the Almighty.

Acts 18:9-11+ And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer (APPARENTLY THERE WERE CIRCUMSTANCES IN CORINTH CONDUCIVE TO PRODUCTION OF FEAR IN PAUL), but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." 11 And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

By signs ([semeion](#)) and wonders ([teras](#)) and miracles ([dunamis](#)) - This would be clear supernatural evidence of a man filled with the Spirit Who enabled such supernatural manifestations. These were not performed as a "performance" but with a purpose, the purpose being to authenticate a man (Paul) as a genuine apostolic envoy from the Lord Jesus Christ (cf Acts 2:22 the purpose of signs by Jesus; Nicodemus' testimony in Jn 3:2). The **signs**, etc, were not that they would believe the Gospel but they would receive the Gospel proclaimer (cf Jn 4:48, Jn 6:26).

THOUGHT - Be very wary of any person who calls themselves an apostle today! Even if they try to point out supposed evidence (signs, etc). There are no apostles of the same type as in the first century. Such persons "are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." (2Co 11:13+)

Murray Harris - These words "do not describe three types of miracles but miracles in general considered from three aspects—their ability to authenticate the message ("signs"), evoke awe ("wonders"), and display divine power ("mighty deeds"). ([1 and 2 Corinthians - The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

Bruce Barton - Paul had performed miracles in almost every city he had visited—from Lystra (Acts 14:8-10) to Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12). Through these signs, the Spirit of God had clearly demonstrated to the Corinthians Paul's apostolic authority and the truthfulness of the gospel message he preached (Romans 15:17-19; 1 Corinthians 2:4). ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Paul made a similar declaration to the Romans writing

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 **in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the**

Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.
(Ro 15:18-19+)

Signs (4592) **semeion** from **sema** = sign) a sign is something that serves as a pointer to aid perception or insight. In the NT a sign speaks of a token which has behind it a particular message to be conveyed. In other words, in John's Gospel (where semeion is most concentrated) the apostle recorded certain miracles not for the wonder (cf "wonders") they produced, but because of the message they taught (Jn 20:31). A sign directs attention away from its unusual nature to the meaning and the significance it points to. It speaks of outward compelling proof of divine authority. **Uses of semeion by Paul** - Rom. 4:11; Rom. 15:19; 1 Co. 1:22; 1 Co. 14:22; 2 Co. 12:12; 2Th 2:9; 2Th 3:17;

Perseverance (5281) **hupomone** from **hupo** = under + **meno** = stay, remain, abide) literally means abiding under. The root idea of **hupomone** is to remain under some discipline, subjecting one's self to something which demands the submission of one's will to something against which one naturally would rebel. It portrays a picture of steadfastly and unflinchingly bearing up under a heavy load and describes that quality of character which does not allow one to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. The picture is that of steadfastness, constancy and endurance. It has in it a forward look, the ability to focus on what is beyond the current pressures (eg Jesus "Who for the joy set before Him **endured** [verb form hupomene] the Cross despising the shame" see notes on [Hebrews 12:2](#)). And so **hupomone** does not describe a grim resignation or a passive "grin and bear" attitude but a triumphant facing of difficult circumstances knowing that even out of evil God guarantees good. It is courageous gallantry which accepts suffering and hardship and turns them into grace and glory. For believers, it is a steadfastness, especially as God enables us to "remain under" (or endure) whatever challenges, trials, tests, afflictions, etc, He providentially allows in our life. Uses by Paul - Ro 2:7; Ro 5:3; Ro 5:4; Ro 8:25; Ro 15:4; Ro 15:5; 2Co. 1:6; 2Co. 6:4; 2Co. 12:12; Col. 1:11; 1Th 1:3; 2Th. 1:4; 2Th 3:5; 1Ti 6:11; 2Ti 3:10; Titus 2:2;

Miracles (1411) **dunamis** from **dunamai** = to be able, to have power) power especially achieving power. It refers to intrinsic power or inherent ability, the power or ability to carry out some function, the potential for functioning in some way (power, might, strength, ability, capability), the power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature.

QUESTION - [What is an apostle?](#)

ANSWER - The word *apostle* means "one who is sent out." In the New Testament, there are two primary usages of the word *apostle*. The first is in specifically referring to the [twelve apostles](#) of Jesus Christ. The second is in generically referring to other individuals who are sent out to be messengers/ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

The twelve apostles held a unique position. In referring to the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:14 states, "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The twelve apostles are also referred to in Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:14; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 14:10, 17, 20; Luke 6:13; 9:1; 22:14; John 6:71; Acts 6:2; and 1 Corinthians 15:5. It was these twelve apostles who were the first messengers of the gospel after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was these twelve apostles who were the foundation of the church—with Jesus being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

This specific type of apostle is not present in the church today. The qualifications of this type of apostle were: (1) to have been a witness of the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1), (2) to have been explicitly chosen by the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:15), and (3) to have the ability to perform signs and wonders (Acts 2:43; 2 Corinthians 12:12). The responsibility of the twelve apostles, laying the foundation of the church, would also argue for their uniqueness. Two thousand years later, we are not still working on the foundation.

Beyond the unique twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, there were also apostles in a generic sense. Barnabas is referred to as an "apostle" in Acts 13:2 and 14:4. [Andronicus and Junias](#) are possibly identified as apostles in Romans 16:7. The same Greek word usually translated "apostle" is used to refer to Titus in 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25. So, there definitely seems to be room for the term *apostle* being used to refer to someone besides the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. Anyone who was "sent" could be called an apostle.

What exactly would be the role of an apostle outside that of the twelve apostles? That is not entirely clear. From the definition of the word, the closest thing today to an apostle, in the general sense, is a missionary. A missionary is a follower of Christ who is sent out with the specific mission of proclaiming the gospel. A missionary is an ambassador of Christ to people who have not heard the good news. However, to prevent confusion, it is likely best to not use the term *apostle* to refer to any position in the church today. The vast majority of occurrences of the word *apostle* or *apostles* in the New Testament refer to the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ.

There are some today who are seeking to [restore the position of apostle](#). This is a dangerous movement. Frequently, those claiming the office of apostle seek authority equal to, or at least rivaling, the authority of the original twelve apostles. There is absolutely no biblical evidence to support such an understanding of the role of apostle today. This would fit with the New

Testament's warning against false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13).

In a sense, all followers of Jesus Christ are called to be apostles. We are all to be His ambassadors (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20). We are all to be "ones who are sent out" (Acts 1:8). We are all to be preachers of the good news (Romans 10:15).

Note – for a discussion on whether Matthias or Paul was the twelfth apostle, please read the following article: [Was Matthias or Paul God's choice to replace Judas as the 12th apostle? GotQuestions.org](#)

QUESTION - [What are the biblical qualifications for apostleship?](#)

ANSWER - An [apostle](#) ("one sent on a mission") is one whom God has *sent* on an errand or with a message. An apostle is accountable to his Sender and carries the authority of his Sender. An apostleship is the office an apostle holds.

Jesus Christ Himself has an "apostleship." He wears "Apostle" as one of His descriptive titles (Hebrews 3:1). He was sent to earth by the Heavenly Father with God's authoritative message, which He faithfully delivered (John 17:1–5).

While Jesus was here on earth, He personally selected from His many followers twelve men and gave them an apostleship—special responsibility to receive and spread His message after He returned to heaven (John 17:6–20; Matthew 10:1–4; Mark 3:14–15). These chosen and sent ones were His apostles. During the time Jesus was training them, He did not explain the criteria that He used to choose them.

One of the twelve was Judas Iscariot, who [betrayed Jesus](#) to His enemies. In agony of conscience, Judas [hanged himself](#) (Matthew 27:5). Thus, when Jesus returned to heaven, He left behind only eleven apostles.

Some days later, the remaining apostles were in Jerusalem praying with Jesus' mother, His brothers, and other believers. The group totaled about 120 (Acts 1:12–26). Simon Peter addressed the group and told them that Psalm 69:25 predicted Judas' desertion and Psalm 109:8 predicted that the defector's place among the apostles should be filled. The apostleship must fall to someone else.

Peter proposed choosing a new apostle and set the qualifications. Not everyone could be considered for an apostleship. Candidates needed to have been with Jesus during the whole three years that Jesus was among them. That is, he needed to be an eyewitness of Jesus' baptism when the Heavenly Father validated Jesus' person and work. He needed to have heard Jesus' life-changing teachings and been present to see His healings and other miracles. He needed to have witnessed Jesus sacrifice Himself on the cross and to have seen Jesus walk, talk, and eat among the disciples again after His resurrection. These were the pivotal facts of Jesus' life, the heart of the message they were to teach, and personal witnesses were required to verify the truth of the good news.

The prayer group in Jerusalem nominated two who met these qualifications for apostleship: Joseph Barsabbas and [Matthias](#). Then the disciples asked God to guide them to know which one was to fill the post. Using a method of determining God's will that was common at that time, they [cast lots](#), thus giving God freedom to make His choice clear. The lot fell to Matthias, and he became the twelfth apostle.

On repeated occasions, the apostles gave witness of their personal observations of Jesus, making such statements as, "We are witnesses of everything Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen" (Acts 10:39–40).

Months later, Saul, one of the Pharisees, was trying to stamp out the new "cult" of Christianity by killing and jailing some of Jesus' followers. While Saul was on one of his deadly errands to Damascus, the living Jesus personally appeared to him. This [undeniable encounter](#) with the resurrected Lord revolutionized Saul's life. In a vision to another believer in Damascus, Jesus said that He had chosen Saul "as My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15; cf. 22:14–15). Following his conversion, [Paul spent some time in Arabia](#), where he was taught by Christ (Galatians 1:12–17). The other apostles recognized that Jesus Himself had appointed their former enemy to be one of them. As Saul went into Gentile territories, he changed his name to the Greek "Paul," and Jesus, who gave Paul his apostleship, sent many messages through him to His churches and to unbelievers. It was this apostle, Paul, who wrote over half of the books of the New Testament.

In two of his Epistles, Paul identifies the office of apostle as the first that Jesus appointed to serve His churches (1 Corinthians 12:27–30; Ephesians 4:11). Clearly, the work of apostleship was to lay the foundation of the Church in a sense secondary only to that of Christ Himself (Ephesians 2:19–20), thus requiring eyewitness authority behind their preaching. After the apostles laid the foundation, the Church could be built.

While Paul never claimed to be included among the original twelve, believers have recognized that Jesus appointed him as His special apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Acts 26:16–18). There are others in the early church referred to as

“apostles” (Acts 14:4, 14; Romans 16:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:6), but only in the sense that they were appointed, authorized, and sent by churches on special errands. These individuals bore the title “apostle” in a limited sense and did not possess all the qualifications of apostleship that the original twelve and Paul did.

No biblical evidence exists to indicate that these thirteen apostles were replaced when they died. See Acts 12:1–2, for example. Jesus appointed the apostles to do the founding work of the Church, and foundations only need to be laid once. After the apostles’ deaths, other offices besides apostleship, not requiring an eyewitness relationship with Jesus, would carry on the work. GotQuestions.org

Related Resource:

- [Is God restoring the offices of apostle and prophet in the church today? | GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

2 Corinthians 12:13 For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

- **I myself:** 2Co 12:14 11:8,9 1Co 9:6,12,15-18
- **forgive:** 2Co 11:7
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

FORGIVENESS FOR NOT TAKING COMPENSATION

For in what respect were you treated as inferior ([hettao](#)) to the rest of the churches - And so Paul is asking how were the Corinthians treated as lower, less than, not the equal of the other churches.

Except that I myself did not become a burden ([katanarkao](#)) to you? - Paul again brings up the subject that he did not accept compensation from the Corinthians, something the false teachers avidly did themselves (2Co 11:20) and aggressively criticized as evidence he was not the "real deal." "The only practice Paul refrained from doing that these "super-apostles" did was charging money for his teaching." (Barton) The Corinthian apparently took this as Paul saying in effect that they were **inferior** to churches (like the Macedonians) who did help him.

Forgive ([aorist imperative](#)) me this wrong ([adikia](#)) - Is this sarcastic? Did Paul really think he had committed an iniquity against the Corinthian church? Of course not. And yet he perceives they were offended by his refusal for recompense and so he asks for their forgiveness. In so doing Paul illustrates what he later wrote to Timothy explaining that "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth and they may come to their senses (AT LEAST SOME OF THE CORINTHIANS NEEDED TO COME TO THEIR SENSES!) and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2Ti 2:24-26)

Treated inferior ([2274](#)) [hettao](#) from **hetton** = less, inferior) first means to be less or inferior. The idea is to be put to the worse and hence to be defeated or conquered. 5v in NT - Acts 7:42; Rom. 9:27; 2 Co. 12:13; 2 Pet. 2:19; 2 Pet. 2:20

Forgive (grant, freely give, bestow) ([5483](#)) **charizomai** from **charis** = grace, undeserved merit or favor) has the basic meaning of to give. To grant as a favor. To give gratuitously, generously, graciously and in kindness. It means to bestow as a gift of grace or out of grace. It means "to bestow a favor unconditionally... then to remit a debt, and hence to forgive." Lk. 7:21; Lk. 7:42; Lk. 7:43; Acts 3:14; Acts 25:11; Acts 25:16; Acts 27:24; Rom. 8:32; 1 Co. 2:12; 2 Co. 2:7; 2 Co. 2:10; 2 Co. 12:13; Gal. 3:18; Eph. 4:32; Phil. 1:29; Phil. 2:9; Col. 2:13; Col. 3:13; Phlm. 1:22

Wrong ([93](#)) [adikia](#) from **a** = not + **dikê** = right) is a condition of not being right, whether with God, according to the standard of His holiness and righteousness or with man, according to the standard of what man knows to be right by his conscience. In secular Greek **adikia** referred to unjust acts, or to deeds which caused personal injury. 24v in NT - Lk. 13:27; Lk. 16:8; Lk. 16:9; Lk. 18:6; Jn. 7:18; Acts 1:18; Acts 8:23; Rom. 1:18; Rom. 1:29; Rom. 2:8; Rom. 3:5; Rom. 6:13; Rom. 9:14; 1 Co. 13:6; 2 Co. 12:13; 2 Thess. 2:10; 2 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:19; Heb. 8:12; Jas. 3:6; 2 Pet. 2:13; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 1:9; 1 Jn. 5:17

2 Corinthians 12:14 Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek

- **this third time** 2Co 1:15 2Co 13:1 1Co 4:19 11:34 16:5
- **for I do not seek what is yours, but you** Pr 11:30 Ac 20:33 1Co 10:33 Php 4:1,17 1Th 2:5,6,8,19,20 1Pe 5:2-4
- **for children are not responsible:** Ge 24:35,36 31:14,15 Pr 13:22 19:14 1Co 4:14,15 1Th 2:11
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PAUL'S DESIRE FOR THE PEOPLE NOT THEIR POSSESSIONS

Here is more literally "**behold**" or "**look**" for Paul uses the attention getting interjection [idou](#) (FIRST WORD IN GREEK SENTENCE FOR ADDED EMPHASIS) which calls for the reader to "listen up" and pay close attention to what follows.

For this third time I am ready to come to you - NIV = "Now I am ready to visit you for the third time." **Third time** supports the premise that he has been to Corinth twice. "On his **first** visit to Corinth, Paul founded the church and stayed a year and six months (Acts 18:11). His **second** visit was a brief, painful visit in between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Now he is prepared to come for a **third** time." ([David Guzik](#))

In 2 Corinthians 13:1 Paul writes "This is the **third time** I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES."

And I will not be a burden ([katanarkao](#)) to you - As when Paul was present with them before, he was not ask them for material help (2Co 11:9).

[David Guzik](#) - Paul lets the Corinthian Christians know that when he comes, though he will receive a collection for the saints in Judea (2 Corinthians 8), he will not receive money from them for his personal support. He will continue his previous practice among the Corinthian Christians of supporting himself and he will not be burdensome to the Corinthian Christians.

Adam Clarke - He who labours for the cause of God should be supported by the cause of God; but woe to that man who aggrandizes himself and grows rich by the spoils of the faithful! And to him especially who has made a fortune out of the pence of the poor! In such a man's heart the love of money must have its throne. As to his professed spirituality, it is nothing; he is a whited sepulchre, and an abomination in the sight of the Lord."

For I do not seek what is yours, but you - Paul explains that he did not want their money or possessions but their heart. Is that not what God primarily desires from each of His children?

[David Guzik](#) - This is the testimony of every godly minister. They do not serve for what they can get from God's people but for what they can give to God's people. They are shepherds, not hirelings.. This is the heart of Jesus towards us. We often think that what God really wants is what we have; but He really wants us. Jesus selflessly seeks our good, and His heart is for us, not for what He can "get" from us.

Alan Redpath - "Paul is only a faint shadow of the Lord Jesus; and if these qualities are found in his life, it is only because they were found completely in the life of Jesus Christ our Lord."

MacArthur - He did not want their money; he wanted their hearts. He wanted their lives for the kingdom of God, and for them to live in righteous obedience to the Word for the glory of God. ([2 Corinthians](#))

For children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children - Paul gives an explanation to illustrate his point. Paul is speaking as the spiritual father (1Co 4:15) of the Corinthians and with this statement conveys his deep care for them. Parents of course are to provide for their children. As their spiritual father Paul was not going to ask money from them. Paul is not saying children when grown are not to aid aging parents and others in need (cf 1Ti 5:4,8,16).

Barton - Fathers in the first century were expected to support their children, saving money and possessions as an inheritance for their sons and a dowry for their daughters. The fact that he refused financial support wasn't a sign of his rejection of the Corinthians but a sign of his great affection for them (see also 2Co 11:11). ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

[David Guzik](#) on **children are not responsible to save up for their parents...** - This explains part of the reason why Paul did not want to receive support from the Corinthian Christians. Since he was their spiritual "father" and they were his spiritual "children," it made sense that they should not feel "burdened" to support him.. At the same time, this is not a compliment towards the Corinthian Christians. Since Paul did gratefully receive support from other churches (Philippians 4:10-19), we know this was not his policy towards all churches. Instead, it is as if Paul is saying, "You Corinthian Christians are not mature enough to support me yet. You are

still spiritual children. When you grow up some, you can be partners with me in the work and support me. But until then I am glad to support myself."

NET NOTE - Grk "children ought not," but this might give the impression that children are not supposed to support sick or aging parents in need of help. That is not what Paul is saying. His point is that children should not have to pay their parent's way.

Burden (2655) ([katanarkao](#) from **kata** - intensifies + **narkao** = go numb) means to grow numb, to become stiff, inactive, and figuratively to weigh heavily upon someone, to become apathetic toward someone, to be burdensome, to be "[deadweight](#)", to be a financial burden to someone by requiring too much support. The idea is to live lazily off of someone else's generosity! Used 3x - 2Co 11:9; 2Co 12:13; 2Co 12:14

2 Corinthians 12:15 I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

- **I will most gladly spend:** 2Co 12:9 2Co 1:6,14 2Co 2:3 2Co 7:3 Joh 10:10,11 Ga 4:10 Php 2:17 Col 1:24 1Th 2:8 2Ti 2:10
- **be expended:** 2Co 6:12,13 2Sa 13:39 17:1-4 18:33 1Co 4:8-18
- **for your souls,** 2Co 12:14 Heb 13:17
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

2 Corinthians 7:3 I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.

Philippians 2:17 (**EXAMPLE OF PAUL EXPENDING HIMSELF FOR THE CHURCH**) But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

PAUL'S WILLINGNESS FOR EXTREME SACRIFICIAL SERVICE

I will most gladly ([hedeos](#)) **spend** ([dapanao](#)) **and be expended for your souls** - This is the antithesis of asking the Corinthians for money. He would rather spend on them. Such a sweet, joyous attitude is a reflection of Paul's total surrender/complete submission to His Lord. Paul is willing to spend his time, energy, strength, etc, and in a sense to be worn out for the Corinthians. The verb **ekdapanao** ([hapax legomen](#)) means literally to be spent completely (used up funds totally, exhausting one's account so to speak) and here is used figuratively of Paul's willingness to sacrifice his life to help the spiritual condition of the Corinthians. This is a powerful statement affirming Paul's heart for the Corinthians. **NLT** paraphrase is a good rendering "I will gladly spend myself and all I have for your spiritual good." The International Children's Bible has "So I am happy to give everything I have for you. I will even give myself for you."

Utley - Paul is using wordplays on money. He did not want them spending money on him, but he would spend himself for them.

THOUGHT - We can give and do it in any number of ways; but do we resent it when we give or serve? A good way to measure this is to see our reaction when our service is unappreciated. Do we resent it? Paul's service was unappreciated by the Corinthian Christians, yet he did not resent it. Instead, he would very gladly spend and be spent for your souls. ([David Guzik](#))

If I love you more, am I to be loved less - **GWT** - "Do you love me less because I love you so much?" **NLT** = "even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me." **If** is a first class conditional sentence assumed to be true that he loved them **more**.

David Guzik - There is hurt in those words! Yet, Paul did not allow that hurt to cripple him or even to rob his joy in serving and living. He would still very gladly spend and be spent for the Corinthian Christians.

Utley on "**more**" This family of terms characterizes Paul's emotional and extravagant literary style in II Corinthians.

MacArthur - Sadly, the Corinthians responded inversely to Paul's self-sacrificial love for them, prompting the apostle's pathetic heart cry, If I love you more, am I to be loved less? The relationship was going backwards; the more affection he gave them, the less they returned (cf. 2 Cor. 6:11-13). Paul had poured his life into the Corinthian church, joyously laboring and sacrificing for them. All he asked for in return was their love—and they were unwilling to give it. ([2 Corinthians](#))

Barton - After expressing his love for the Corinthians, Paul asked what any parent would ask his or her children: "Will you love me after I have spent all my life loving you?" ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Most gladly (2234) ([hedeos](#) from [hedus/hedys](#) = sweet) is an adverb which literally means sweetly, and figuratively as used in this passage means **gladly** or **joyously**. **Hedeos** thus speaks of the experience of gladness which is based primarily upon the pleasure one derives from the activity (in this case the activity of "boasting" about weaknesses)! There is a sweetness in such boasting, not because the experience "feels good" to our outer man, but because of the divine assurance that it will "yield good" in our inner man (cp 2Co 4:16, 17, 18 - observe from these great passages how a knowledge of the end result, fortifies us to fight the good fight in the midst of the experiencing of afflictions, weaknesses, etc). Mk. 6:20; Mk. 12:37; 2 Co. 11:19; 2 Co. 12:9; 2 Co. 12:15

Spend (1159) [dapanao](#) from [dapane](#) = expense, cost; BDAG says it is from [dapto](#) = devour, of wild beasts) means to spend freely. The most common meaning of this verb is "to spend money." It is used more broadly, however, to mean spending other things, such as time, energy, or one's strength. Mark 5:26 uses it in reference to a woman who had spent all her money on physicians, while in Luke 15:14 it describes the prodigal son's profligate spending. 5v in NT - Mk. 5:26; Lk. 15:14; Acts 21:24; 2 Co. 12:15; Jas. 4:3

Candlelight Wisdom

I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls. — 2 Corinthians 12:15

Today's Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1-8

While traveling in Finland, I appreciated the Finns' lavish use of candles. They never treat them as mere ornaments. Candles bring warmth and light into their homes during short winter days. The Finns know that a candle's purpose is missed unless it is burned. But candles should burn at one end only—a lesson I needed to learn.

When my husband and I began our missionary work, I longed to burn out for God. Within several years I had burned out all right, but not for God. Mine was a classic case of useless burnout, brought on by many self-caused stresses.

One night I hit rock bottom and discovered that the rock was Christ. As He began teaching me dependence on Him for all things, the candle of my life was relighted for His use.

I now see a difference between so-called "Christian burnout" and "burning out for God." Burnout stems from wastefully burning the candle of our lives at both ends—hardly wise for candles or Christians. Burning out for God means our lives are spent wisely in His service—an echo of Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 12:15. Once used up for God, we'll be raised up for heavenly service (Rev. 22:3). It is for this purpose we were made! By: Joanie Yoder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Thinking It Over

What are you doing to serve God?

Do you rely on His strength or your own?

Ask God to help you depend on Him in everything.

What's important is not how much we do for God, but how much God does through us.

2 Corinthians 12:16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit.

The Living Bible - Some of you are saying, "It's true that his visits didn't seem to cost us anything, but he is a sneaky fellow, that Paul, and he fooled us. As sure as anything he must have made money from us some way."

REB All very well, you say; I did not myself prove a burden to you, but I did use a confidence trick to take you in.

- **I did not burden you myself** 2Co 12:13 11:9,10
- **nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am;** That is, as my enemies represent, 2Co 1:12 4:2 7:2 10:2,3 1Th 2:3,5 1Pe 2:3
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PAUL HAD NOT BURDENED AND NOT SCAMMED THEM!

But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself- NLT = "Some of you admit I was not a burden to you" The Corinthians (at least some of them) agreed Paul had not overburdened them or "**weighed them down**" (katabareo - [hapax legomen](#)) with requests for material support.

MacArthur - But be that as it may—despite their unreturned love for him—Paul would still not be **aburden** to them. Their love may have diminished, but his would not. Despite their diffidence, coldness, and disaffection, he would continue to love them sacrificially. ([2 Corinthians](#))

Nevertheless (alla - strong adversative or contrast) **crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit**- Paul again resorts to **sarcasm**. **Nevertheless** contrasts Paul's denial of being a burden with the accusation that he was seeking to "**scam**" them. Paul's opponents represented him as a **crafty** (**panourgios** - [hapax legomen](#)) who deliberately had taken them in to his trap by baiting it so to speak with deliberate dishonesty in order to take advantage of them. There is an ironic play on words with **panourgios** which is related to the noun [panourgia](#) Paul used to describe the "serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness ([panourgia](#))." (2Co 11:3) It is ironic because the servants of Satan who themselves were masquerading as messengers of righteousness (2Co 11:15) were accusing Paul of unrighteous conduct! Talk about the [pot calling the kettle black!](#)

Utley - This may relate to the contribution for the Jerusalem church in chapters 8–9. The false teachers possibly accused him of sending others to collect money for himself (cf. vv. 17–18). Paul's comment here is biting sarcasm!

Barton - "Was this Paul's devious way of collecting even more money for himself?" "Would he dip his hand into the pot once it was all collected?" According to them, the Jerusalem collection was Paul's way of taking advantage of them. ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Ryrie comments "To be sure, they said, he didn't take any money while he was here, but what about that collection for the saints? Who knows in whose pockets that will go?"

MacArthur - To get around the glaringly obvious difficulty that Paul had not taken any money from the Corinthians, the false apostles insisted that he had not yet sprung his trap. Paul had already described in detail the collection he was taking for the poor saints at Jerusalem (chaps. 8; 9). That, according to the false apostles, was the point of Paul's scheme; the money that was collected at Corinth would never reach Jerusalem. Instead, they claimed, it would go to line Paul's pockets. ([2 Corinthians](#))

2 Corinthians 12:17 *Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?*

- 2Co 12:18 2Ki 5:16,20-27 1Co 4:17 16:10
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PAUL REFUTES THE ACCUSATION OF CRAFTINESS

Certainly I have not taken advantage of ([pleonekteo](#)) *you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I*- NLT begins with "But how?" how would he try to scam them? NLT then says "Did any of the men I sent to you take advantage of you?" "Paul goes right to the point without hedging." (Robertson) Paul let's the evidence speak for itself by asking the Corinthians a rhetorical question which expects a negative answer. In essence he is saying that he had not defrauded or cheated the Corinthians by sending them men who had **bilked** them. And in mentioning Titus it would be clear that he was not acting alone in regard to the collection for Jerusalem.

David Guzik - Paul proves that the charge he is being crafty is false. He reminds the Corinthian Christians that neither Paul nor any of his associates had ever behaved in a financially inappropriate way before the Corinthians.

Taken advantage (defrauded) ([4122](#)) [pleonekteo](#) from **pleion** = more + **écho** = have <> **pleonektes** is one who wants more, person covetous of something that others have, a defrauder for gain) literally means to have more than another and then to take advantage of any one. To claim more. To covet. To have more than one's due. To selfishly attempt to gain more at all costs and by all means disregarding others and their rights. Defraud means to selfishly and greedily take something at someone else's expense. 5v in NT - 2 Co. 2:11; 2 Co. 7:2; 2 Co. 12:17; 2 Co. 12:18; 1 Thess. 4:6

2 Corinthians 12:18 I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?

- **Titus:** 2Co 2:12,13 7:2,6
- **with:** 2Co 8:6,18
- **Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit** 2Co 8:6,16-23 Php 2:19-22
- **in the same steps:** Nu 16:15 1Sa 12:3,4 Ne 5:14 Ac 20:33-35 Ro 4:12 1Pe 2:21
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him - Presumably this is the brother in 2Co 8:18 where Paul wrote "We have sent along with him the **brother** whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches."

Utley on **brother with him** - This taking along the representatives from the churches was Paul's way to de-arm the accusations related to this contribution to the Jerusalem Church.

Titus did not take any advantage of (pleonekteo) you, did he? - This is a point blank question. This question about the integrity of Titus also expects a negative answer.

MacArthur - If Paul had, as the false apostles insisted, planned to embezzle the collection (FOR JERUSALEM CHURCH), he could not have acted alone. There would have had to have been collusion between him and his ministry partners. That, of course, made the allegations even more far-fetched. Titus, whom the Corinthians knew well (cf. 2Co 8:23), was also involved in the collection (cf. 2 Cor. 8:6, 16). In addition, two unnamed brothers in Christ (8:18–19, 22) had assisted him. ([2 Corinthians](#))

Bruce Barton - Since the Corinthians admired Titus, Paul reminded them that Titus was functioning as his representative. If they had found nothing wrong with Titus's conduct, how could they find anything wrong with him, the very person Titus was representing? Titus had learned what steps to take from Paul. How could Paul's own steps be any different? This appeal would have been even more persuasive because Titus himself was delivering the epistle known as 2 Corinthians. His impeccable behavior among them would be a continual rebuttal to the gossip of those who were discrediting Paul. ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps - This question expects an affirmative reply. You have observed the character and integrity of Titus. Imagine he is a mirror image of me. He is asking the Corinthians to remember that just a Titus had behaved in the more recent past, so too Paul had behaved when he was originally among them for 18 months. The purpose of the questions is to show that neither Paul nor Titus had taken advantage of them in any way, as they had charged.

Robertson on **in the same spirit** - The locative case, "in the same spirit," makes it mean that Paul's attitude is the same as that of Titus and most likely is correct, for "in the same steps" (tois autois ichnesin) is in locative case.

2 Corinthians 12:19 All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.

NLT - Perhaps you think we're saying these things just to defend ourselves. No, we tell you this as Christ's servants, and with God as our witness. Everything we do, dear friends, is to strengthen you.

ESV Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved.

- **All this time you have been thinking:** 2Co 3:1 5:12
- **it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ** 2Co 11:10,31 Ro 9:1
- **and all for your upbuilding:** 2Co 5:13 10:8 13:10 1Co 9:12-23 10:33 14:26
- **beloved:** 2Co 12:15 7:1 Ro 12:19 1Co 10:14 Php 4:1
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 4:3-5+ (**PAUL NOT DEFENDING HIMSELF**) But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of

nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

2 Corinthians 10:8+ (**PAUL'S DESIRE - TO EDIFY THE CORINTHIANS**) For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave **for building you up** ([oikodome](#)) and not for destroying you, I will not be put to shame,

Ephesians 4:11-13+ (**A PASTOR'S JOB**) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, **to the building up** ([oikodome](#)) **of the body of Christ**; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

PAUL IS NOT WRITING IN SELF-DEFENSE

All this time - This is a reference to the current letter up to this point.

You have been thinking that we are defending ([apologeomai](#)) **ourselves to you** - The implication is that the Corinthians had misjudged Paul's words. Paul wants to make sure they did not think he was trying to defend his own reputation.

Robertson on defending ourselves - He is not just apologizing, but is in deadly earnest, as they will find out when he comes.

Actually, it is in the sight of God - Paul was not concerned about their response to him but whether he was pleasing to God. And so here Paul calls God as his Witness as to what he has been saying. Paul's oath of truthfulness before God is similar to what he had written in 2Co 2:17 "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God." If was not Paul who was on trial before the Corinthians, but closer to the truth is that the Corinthians were "on trial" before God as to how they would respond to Paul's words in this letter, especially 2Co 10-13.

MacArthur - Paul knew that God alone would render the final verdict on his life—and that verdict would be, "Well done, good and faithful slave.... Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21)...The Corinthians were not Paul's judges, but they were his spiritual responsibility. ([2 Corinthians](#))

Barton - By clearly stating that he was speaking before God at various points in this letter (see 2Co 1:12-14, 23; 2:10; 3:4;4:2; 5:10-11; 10:18; 11:11, 31), Paul was trying to impress on the Corinthians the gravity of their actions. This wasn't merely a debate between two teachers, so the Corinthians could judge who had spoken with the most poise. This was a dispute that was being held in the throne room of God. The Lord himself would judge who was his trustworthy representative (see 2Co 5:20; 6:3-10). ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

That we have been speaking in Christ - He adds that it is **in Christ**, in covenant with Christ, speaking as Christ's representative.

And all for your upbuilding ([oikodome](#)) - He defends his right to protect the Corinthians for their **upbuilding**, not their tearing down. In short everything he has been saying is to strengthen them as a church. Calling them beloved reflects his love for them in spite of all the difficulties and their misunderstanding of why he had said what he said. To reiterate, it was building them up, not tearing them down, not to exploit them or defraud them.

David Guzik - "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."

Barton - All of his efforts were dedicated to building up the Corinthians in the faith and were directed to this purpose, whether it was delaying a visit (2Co 1:23-24) or writing a stern letter of warning (2Co 7:8-9), whether it was his willingness to endure suffering (2Co 1:6) or his refusal to take money (2Co 11:7; 2Co 12:14-15). Paul knew that God himself could see his motives, that everything he did was out of love for the Corinthians (2Co 11:11) and concern for their spiritual welfare (2Co 11:2-3). ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Beloved ([agapetos](#)) describes the Corinthians as in a very special relationship with Paul. **Beloved** is a term of endearment and is someone that you love, and someone you are deeply devoted to. In the context of the New Testament agape love speaks of God's divine and infinite love, a love that seeks the ultimate spiritual welfare of the one loved. **Agapetos** could be translated "divinely loved ones."

Defending (626) **apologeomai** from **apó** = from + **lógos** = speech) literally means to speak oneself off, hence to plead for oneself, to defend or speak or plead for oneself before a tribunal or elsewhere. Lk. 12:11; Lk. 21:14; Acts 19:33; Acts 24:10; Acts 25:8; Acts 26:1; Acts 26:2; Acts 26:24; Rom. 2:15; 2 Co. 12:19

Upbuilding (edification, edifying) (3619) **oikodome** from **oikos** = dwelling, house + **doma** = building or **demo** = to build) is **literally** the building of a house and came to refer to any building process. **Oikodome** can refer to the actual process of building or construction. Another literal meaning is as a reference to a building or edifice which is the result of a construction process (Mt 24:1, Mk 13:1, 2 are the only literal uses of **oikodome** in the NT). Figuratively the idea is the process of edification or building up spiritually or spiritual strengthening. (See sermon by Alexander Maclaren entitled "["Edification"](#)") 18v in NT - Matt. 24:1; Mk. 13:1; Mk. 13:2; Rom. 14:19; Rom. 15:2; 1Co. 3:9; 1Co. 14:3; 1Co. 14:5; 1Co. 14:12; 1Co. 14:26; 2Co. 5:1; 2 Co. 10:8; 2Co. 12:19; 2Co. 13:10; Eph. 2:21; Eph. 4:12; Eph. 4:16; Eph. 4:29

Beloved (27) **agapetos** from **agapao** = to love, **agape** = unconditional love borne by Spirit - Gal 5:22^{note}) means beloved, dear, very much loved. **Agapetos** describes the love of another, this love being called out of the "giver's" heart by preciousness of the recipient of the love (the "beloved"). **Agapetos** is used only of Christians as united (by covenant, the New Covenant) with God and/or with each other in love. **Agapetos in Corinthian letters** - 1 Co. 4:14; 1 Co. 4:17; 1 Co. 10:14; 1 Co. 15:58; 2 Co. 7:1; 2 Co. 12:19;

2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;

NET 2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that somehow when I come I will not find you what I wish, and you will find me not what you wish. I am afraid that somehow there may be quarreling, jealousy, intense anger, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.

BGT 2 Corinthians 12:20 φοβομαι γρ μπως λθν οχ ο ους θλω ερω μς κγ ερεθ μν ον οθ λετε· μπως ρις, ζλος, θυμο, ριθε αι, καταλαλια, ψιθυρισμο, φυσισεις, καταστασαι·

NLT 2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that when I come I won't like what I find, and you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior.

ESV 2 Corinthians 12:20 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish-- that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

NIV 2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

- **I may find you to be not what I wish** 2Co 12:21 13:9
- **may be found by you to be not what you wish**: 2Co 1:23,24 2:1-3 10:2,6,8,9 13:2,10 1Co 4:18-21 5:3-5
- **disputes**: 1Co 1:11 3:3,4 4:6-8,18 6:7,8 11:16-19 14:36,37 Ga 5:15,19-21 Ga 5:26 Eph 4:31,32 Jas 3:14-16 4:1-5 1Pe 2:1
- **gossip**: Ps 41:7 Pr 16:28 Ro 1:29
- **arrogance**: 2Pe 2:18 Jude 1:16
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Galatians 5:19-21+ (**COMPARE** 2Co 12: 20-21 - **NOTE SIMILARITY TO THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH**) Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who (present tense - habitually) practice ([prasso](#)) such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (**STRIFE IN PAST**) Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are

quarrels ([eris](#)) among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

1 Corinthians 3:3-5 (**STRIFE AND JEALOUSY - FACTIONS**) for you are still fleshly. For since there is **jealousy** ([zelos](#)) and **strife** ([eris](#)), are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.

1 Corinthians 4:21 What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

PAUL'S APPREHENSION ABOUT PERSISTENT SIN

For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish - NLT = "For I am afraid that when I come I won't like what I find, and you won't like my response" Paul expresses his concern about the spiritual condition of his spiritual children. He has fears that they might not be in good spiritual condition. The choice is theirs. In that event they would learn he would not hesitate to address their spiritual maladies headon with full apostolic authority!

David Guzik - Looking forward to his next visit, Paul warns the Corinthian Christians. If they are not in a state pleasing to Paul (before the Lord), then they will find him to be in a state not pleasing to them.

Barton - On his last visit to Corinth, Paul had warned those who were persisting in sin to repent of their ways (2Co 13:2). He had even postponed his plans to visit Corinth in order to give them time to put their church in order (2Co 1:23-2:4). According to Titus's report, the Corinthians had made some progress in this. They had taken appropriate action against the anonymous offender (2Co 2:5-11; 7:11). ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

That perhaps there will be strife (see [eris](#) - see [passages above](#)), **jealousy** (see [zelos](#) - see [passages above](#)), **angry tempers** ([thumos](#) - violent temper that flares up in an instant), **disputes** ([eritheia](#)), **slanders** ([katalalia](#)), **gossip** ([psithurismos](#)), **arrogance** ([phusiosis](#)), **disturbances** ([akatastasia](#)) - Paul is firing words like bullets out of a machine gun and they are all painful "bullets" describing his fear that the church is a spiritual "truckwreck." This is like Paul's **warning shot over the bow!** Note that these sins in 2Co 12:20-21 are very similar to the list of sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. Note also that those who practice these sins "that those who (present tense - habitually) practice ([prasso](#)) such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal 5:21+)

James explains why **jealousy** and **disputes** (selfish ambition) has the potential for such creating disorder and **disturbances** in the church at Corinth - "if you have bitter **jealousy** ([zelos](#)) and **selfish ambition** ([eritheia](#)) in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth....For where **jealousy** ([zelos](#)) and **selfish ambition** ([eritheia](#)) exist, there is **disorder** ([akatastasia](#)) and every evil thing. (James 3:14, 16+)

Paul had described their **arrogance** ([phusiosis](#)), on several occasions - 1Co 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1. (each verse uses the related verb [phusioo](#))

Robertson - With graphic pen pictures Paul describes what had been going on against him during his long absence.

MacArthur - Paul's use of the term **perhaps** shows his restraint and tenderness. Rather than making a complete denunciation of the Corinthians, the apostle merely expressed his concern and misgivings. When he arrived in Corinth, he would determine their spiritual condition and take the appropriate action. In the meantime, he wrote this epistle to begin the process of rooting out the noxious weeds of unrepentant sin in the church. ([2 Corinthians](#))

Barton summarizes this list of sins of the flesh - In his earlier letter, Paul had already warned the Corinthians of dividing into factions and competing for power in the church (see 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3). One of the key problems in the church was the Corinthians' **jealousy** of each other (1 Corinthians 3:3-5). Instead of concentrating on what they could each do for God, they were enviously eyeing one another, coveting the abilities and resources God had given their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ (see Ro 13:13). It was the Corinthians' selfishness ([zelos](#)) that was also causing problems in the church. In 1Co 4:6-7, Paul had described how they were boasting in themselves, and he had already warned them to focus their energies on preserving Christ's honor-not their own reputation. These evil attitudes were resulting in outbursts of anger in the church. Evidently, tempers were short because of the division and jealousy in the Corinthian church. Instead of growing into a supportive community of faith (1Co 12:12-13), the Corinthians were dividing into factions and fighting each other. In the process, they were tearing down the church, the very temple of God (1Co 3:16-17). These **disputes** were not one-time affairs. They were ongoing quarrels, where church members on each side began backstabbing each other. The Greek word used by Paul here ([katalalia](#)) literally means "evil speech" or "slander". In this way, the Corinthians were impugning the reputation of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10). Not only were

they slandering each other, but they did so in secret. They continued to maliciously gossip about each other-and also, presumably, Paul (see 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10). The Greek word ([psithurismos](#) for "gossip" is literally "whisperer." (KJV = whisperings). Instead of building each other up in the Christian faith (1Co 12:7), the Corinthians were simply growing conceited (see 1Co 4:6; 8:1). The Greek word Paul used for "conceit" ([phusiosis](#)) means "inflated." The Corinthians had become inflated with pride (cf 1Co 8:1). Evidently, members in the Corinthian church were especially gifted; therefore, many of them aspired to rise to prominence in the growing church (1Co 12:27-13:1; 14:12). But their arrogance had become a formidable obstacle to God and his work. If they would only seek after God's honor instead of their own glory, then God could establish his kingdom among them. Finally, Paul warned the Corinthians of disorderly behavior ([akatastasia](#)), just as he had done in 1 Corinthians (1Co 6:1-8; 11:20-22, 33-34; 14:32-33, 40). Paul was speaking about any behavior that disrupted worship services or contributed to the disunity of the church. ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Strife (2054) [eris](#) means contention, wrangling, quarrels. It refers to engagement in rivalry, especially with reference to positions taken in a matter, such as a belief in the meaning of a genealogy! strife, a general term that carries the ideas of all kinds of self-centered rivalry and contentiousness about the truth. **Strife** is an expression of enmity with bitter sometimes violent conflict or dissension. It refers to persistent contention, bickering, petty disagreement, and enmity. It reflects a spirit of antagonistic competitiveness that fights to have its own way, regardless of cost to itself or of harm to others. It is produced by a deep desire to prevail over others, to gain the highest prestige, prominence, and recognition possible. Strife is characterized by self-indulgence and egoism. It has no place even for simple tolerance, much less for humility or love. **9v in NT** - Rom. 1:29; Rom. 13:13; 1Co. 1:11; 1Co. 3:3; 2Co. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4 = false teachers - "disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions"; Titus 3:9

Jealousy (2205) [zelos](#) from [zeo](#) = to be hot, to boil [from the sound of bubbling water], figuratively to be fervent or show great enthusiasm; see related studies [zeoo](#); [zelotes](#)) was originally a good word which described fervour in advancing a cause or in rendering service. In the NT **zelos** conveys the **negative** meaning in many passages (Acts 5:17, 13:45, Ro 13:13, 1 Cor 3:3, 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5: 20, Phil 3:6, James 3:14, 16). **Jealousy** describes envy of someone else's possessions, achievements, or advantages. It describes the spirit which cannot be content with what it has and looks with a jealous eye on every blessing given to someone else and denied to itself. It is the grasping, protective, self-centeredness that causes people to be suspicious of others as potential rivals. **16v in NT** - Jn. 2:17; Acts 5:17; Acts 13:45; Rom. 10:2; Rom. 13:13; 1 Co. 3:3; 2 Co. 7:7; 2 Co. 7:11; 2 Co. 9:2; 2 Co. 11:2; 2 Co. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 3:6; Heb. 10:27; Jas. 3:14; Jas. 3:16

Angry tempers (in the plural) (2372) [thumos](#) from [thúo](#) = move impetuously, particularly as the air or wind, a violent motion or passion of the mind; move violently, rush along) describes **passion** (as if breathing hard) and so speaks of an agitated or "heated" anger that rushes along (impulse toward a thing). **Thumos** describes a tumultuous welling up of the whole spirit; a mighty emotion which seizes and moves the whole inner man. **Thumos** (especially when accompanied by breathing violently or hard) pictures a "panting rage". We've all seen individuals in whom there was a sudden outburst of this type of passionate anger. You can even see their nasal passages widening to take in more air in the heat of their passion. **Thumos** marked the synagogue congregation at Nazareth that became enraged at Jesus' teaching (Luke 4:28), the pagan crowd that rioted at Ephesus (Acts 19:28), and Satan's rage (Rev. 12:12). It, too, is one of the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:20), and hence believers are to avoid it (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8). **18v in NT** - Lk. 4:28; Acts 19:28; Rom. 2:8; 2Co. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Heb. 11:27; Rev. 12:12; Rev. 14:8; Rev. 14:10; Rev. 14:19; Rev. 15:1; Rev. 15:7; Rev. 16:1; Rev. 16:19; Rev. 18:3; Rev. 19:15

Disputes (2052) [eritheia](#) means self seeking, strife, contentiousness, extreme selfishness, rivalry and those who seek only their own. In a word, **eritheia** is the desire to be number one no matter the cost! **Thayer** adds that it refers to "a courting distinction, a desire to put oneself forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts; partisanship, factiousness". **Eritheia** describes personal gratification and self-fulfillment at any cost, which are the ultimate goals of all fleshly endeavors. **Eritheia** has no room for others, much less genuine humility. It is that ultimate self-elevation rampant in the world today which is the antithesis of what the humble, selfless, giving, loving, and obedient child of God is called to be in Christ and only possible in the power of His Spirit. Paul used **eritheia** of those who were "selfishly ambitious" (Ro 2:8), of those who preached Christ from "selfish ambition" (Php 1:17), as one of the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:20) and as characterizing earthly, demonic wisdom (James 3:14, 16). **Eritheia** is essentially the opposite of "humility of mind" (Php 2:3)**7v in NT** - Rom. 2:8; 2 Co. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:17; Phil. 2:3; Jas. 3:14; Jas. 3:16

Slanders (plural = *slanders*) (2636) ([katalalia](#) from [katá](#) = against, down + [laleo](#) = to speak) Literally it means "Speaking against" or "Speaking down" to a person, by extension describing the act of defaming or slandering, evil speaking, evil speech, evil report, slander, back-biting lies, defamation., disparagement. Speaking about others in such a way as to belittle or defame their character. This word is not found in classic Greek. The related verb *katalaleō* is "speak against" in James 4:11. **Only used twice** - 2Co. 12:20; 1Pe 2:1

Gossip ([hapax legomen](#))(5587)(**psithurismos** from **psithurizo** (to whisper) describes a whispering, hiss and in a bad sense gossip, tale-bearing, secret slandering, that quiet, subtle, behind-the-back defamation (contrasting with slanders which is open, public vilification). **BDAG** - "derogatory information about someone that is offered in a tone of confidentiality, (secret) gossip, tale-bearing." Robertson = "to whisper into one's ear. An onomatopoeic word for the sibilant murmur of a snake charmer (Eccl. 10:11)."

Arrogance ([hapax legomen](#))(5450)(**phusiosis** from **phusioo** = to puff or blow up from **phusa** = bellows) literally puffing up, inflation; figuratively pride, conceit; in plural as in this verse it means acts of arrogance, conceited behavior. It was a secular medical term describing a 'inflated/bloated condition, a swelling.

Disturbances (disorder, contusion, tumult)(181) **akatastasia** from **akatastatos** = unstable from **a** = negative + **kathistemi** = set in order) means literally without order or stability and thus has a basic meaning of instability = to an unsettled state of affairs, an upheaval, a state of violent group disturbance, a tumult, or unrest, especially in a political or social setting (riots, revolutions). In 2 Cor. 12:20 and James 3:16 the context suggests that **akatastasia** is used of the disruption of the Christian community by worldly disputes among the brethren and in both of these passages jealousy and selfish ambition ([eritheia](#)) are listed prior to **akatastasia** as factors which predispose to social instability. **5v in NT** - Lk. 21:9; 1 Co. 14:33; 2 Co. 6:5; 2 Co. 12:20; Jas. 3:16

2 Corinthians 12:21 I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

- **my God:** 2Co 12:7 8:24 9:3,4
- **may humiliate me** 2Co 2:1-4 Ex 32:31 De 9:15,25 1Sa 15:35 Ezr 9:3 10:1 Ps 119:136 Jer 9:1 13:17 Lu 9:41,42 Ro 9:2 Php 3:18,19
- **many of those who have sinned:** 2Co 13:2
- **and not repented** 2Co 2:5-11 7:9-11 10:6 1Co 6:9-11 Rev 22:20
- **impurity, immorality and sensuality:** Ro 13:13 1Co 5:1,9-11 6:15-18 Ga 5:19 Eph 5:5,6 Col 3:5 1Th 4:3-7 Heb 13:4 1Pe 4:2,3 2Pe 2:10-14,18 Jude 1:7,23 Rev 21:8 22:15
- [2 Corinthians 12 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Galatians 5:19-21+ (**IN 2Cor 12: 20-21 NOTE SIMILARITY TO THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH**) Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: **immorality, impurity, sensuality**, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which **I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you**, that those who (present tense - habitually) **practice** ([prasso](#)) **such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is **immorality** among you, and **immorality** of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.

1 Corinthians 6:13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for **immorality**, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee **immorality**. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

PAUL'S FEAR - A PRACTICE THAT DOES NOT MAKE PERFECT!

Note that the moral sins Paul mentions in this verse are identical to the sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:19+! The danger for the Corinthians is that some of the members of the church were [practicing not actions that would make them perfect](#) but actions that potentially could take them to perdition (cf Gal 5:21b+)!

I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate ([tapeinoo](#)) **me before you** - The Greek does not actually have a word for afraid. Young's Literal is more accurate - "Lest again having come, my God may humble me." Clearly afraid is implied and it is so rendered in most of the modern translations (NAS, ESV, NLT, NIV, CSB) **When I come again** assumes this is true - he will come to Corinth again (the third time - 2Co 12:14, 13:1)! Again Paul expresses his sincere fear. Why would Paul be humiliated? He saw himself as their spiritual father and their teacher for over 18 months and he only wanted to see them practice what he had taught. It

they were manifesting the [litany](#) of sins in verses 20-21, Paul would be ashamed and it would give his critics ammunition to substantiate their charges -- if his spiritual children were in sin it would allow his opponents to question the efficacy of his teaching. He is fearful that those he addressed as saints are acting more like "aint's" (so to speak), manifesting rotten fruits that characterized their former pagan lives.

Barton - Paul had already told the Corinthians that he was concerned that he might be humiliated when he came to Corinth. Some Macedonian Christians were accompanying him. If Paul found the church in disorder and the Corinthians refusing to participate in the Jerusalem collection, then Paul would be humiliated in the presence of the devout Christians from Macedonia (see 2Co 9:3-5). ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

And I may mourn ([pentheo](#)) over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity([akatharsia](#)), immorality ([porneia](#)) and sensuality ([aselgeia](#)) which they have practiced ([prasso](#)) - Note he says that he might **mourn ([pentheo](#))** and not that he would be angry. He would lament from deep sorrow over their sin. While many in Corinth had experienced genuine repentance (2Cor 7:6-11+), he was fearful others had not had this supernatural experience. The false teachers spouted false doctrine, which always leads to faulty living. If you are fed unsound doctrine and believe it, you will behave the way you believe! Sin grieved Paul, especially sin in those who were supposed to be acting like his spiritual children. Not only would he be humiliated and ashamed, but he would be grieved regarding their sinful state. **Have sinned** is in the perfect tense which emphasizes their sinful behavior is actually their state or continued condition (began in past and continues to the present), a spiritually dangerous place especially if one is self-deluded into thinking they can habitually practice these sexual sins and inherit the kingdom of God! (see Gal 5:21b+). Paul's desire was expressed in 2Co 11:2+, writing "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a **pure virgin**." Now he fears the Bride may be defiled and polluted by sins, not just the list in verse 20, but now a list of sexual sins.

Impurity ([akatharsia](#)), immorality ([porneia](#)) and sensuality ([aselgeia](#)) all refer to sexual sins and address a culture in Corinth which was rife with idolatry and immorality (the two usually "traffic together!") which led to the coining of the Greek verb "Corinthianize" which meant, "to go to bed with a prostitute!" What a legacy for a town to leave!

While Paul had described genuine repentance of the Corinthians in chapter 7, now he expresses his concern that many have not had a genuine change of heart and thus have not turned away from their moral (sexual) sins which they have made a practice ([prasso](#)) of committing. The implication is that he may find they did not just occasionally commit these sins but that they had become their habitual practice (cf Gal 5:21+).

John Calvin - "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."

John MacArthur makes a very important statement that should get all our attention - Despite its critical importance, however, repentance is a needlessly misunderstood and controversial topic in contemporary Christianity. Some would strip repentance of any connection with sin, defining it as merely a change of mind about who Christ is. They see it as merely a synonym for faith that does not involve turning from sin. Writes one advocate of that view, "Repentance means to change one's mind; it does not mean to change one's life" (Thomas L. Constable, "The Gospel Message," in Donald K. Campbell, ed., Walvoord: A Tribute [Chicago: Moody, 1982], 207). (**ED**: Preceptaustin.org has occasional quotes from Constable for he has some good comments in some areas but his view of repentance is not one of them. This is a very troubling statement by Constable. If there is never a change in "one's life" or behavior, how could one ever be assured that they truly possessed the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ? cf Ro 8:9+) But Scripture knows nothing of a repentance that does not involve turning from sin. ([2 Corinthians](#))

Barton - Paul hinted here that finding the Corinthian congregation in disorder would mean more than his own humiliation. He would also have to mourn over those who stubbornly refused to repent of their sins. The sins Paul listed here are sexual sins ([1 & 2 Corinthians Life Application Bible Commentary](#))

Humiliate (verb) ([5013](#)) **tapeinoo** from **tapeinos** = low, not high, figuratively of one's attitude/social position) literally means to level, to cause something to be lower or to make low (eg, to level off a mountain in Lk 3:5 from Lxx of Is 40:4). **Tapeinoo** means to bow down, to make low, to humble. Most NT uses of **tapeinoo** are figurative and include the following meanings: To cause someone to lose prestige, to reduce to a meaner condition or lower rank, to abase. To be ranked below others. **11v in NT** - Matt. 18:4; Matt. 23:12; Lk. 3:5; Lk. 14:11; Lk. 18:14; 2 Co. 11:7; 2 Co. 12:21; Phil. 2:8; Phil. 4:12; Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6

Mourn ([3996](#)) **pentheo** from **pénthos** = mourning) means to mourn for, lament. **Pentheo** denotes loud mourning such as the lament for the dead or for a severe, painful loss. It is grief and sorrow caused by profound loss, especially death. Mourning can reflect an outward expression of sorrow. It is to experience sadness or grief as the result of depressing circumstances or the condition of persons and so to be sad, to grieve, to bewail or to lament. Grieving over a personal hope (relationship) that *dies*, **Pentheō** ("mourn over a death") refers to "*manifested grief*" *severe* enough to *take possession* of a person and hence

cannot be hid. This is the same meaning of *penthéō* throughout *antiquity*. **10v in NT** - Matt. 5:4; Matt. 9:15; Mk. 16:10; Lk. 6:25; 1 Co. 5:2; 2 Co. 12:21; Jas. 4:9; Rev. 18:11; Rev. 18:15; Rev. 18:19

Repent (3340) **metanoeo** from **meta** = with, among + **noeo** = to think, exercise the mind <> from **nous** = mind; cf **metanoia**) means to have another mind. **Friberg** says it literally means to "perceive afterward, with the implication of being too late to avoid consequences." (Analytical Lexicon). **Metanoeo** means to change one's mind (one's heart) in respect to sin, God, and self. To turn to God and from sin (Luke 15:7,10_± = "one sinner who **repents**", cf illustration of repentance = 1 Th 1:9_±). While **repentance** involves an intellectual decision, it is more than that because the intellectual decision must produce a change in one's behavior. **Repentance** is aptly depicted by the military command "**About, face!**" The repentant person in effect turns around 180 degrees and goes the other direction. And keep in mind that the spiritual dynamics of true repentance are enabled by the Holy Spirit (cf Acts 5:31_±, Acts 11:18_±, 2 Ti 2:25_±). In other words repentance is a work of grace and not merely a human effort, although it does require the repentant individual to make a **volitional** choice. Repentance then involves the mysterious interaction of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Metanoeo in Corinthians - 2 Co. 12:21. 32v in the NT - Note especially Jesus uses of metanoeo 6 times in His words to the 7 churches in Revelation 2-3 where He had to rebuke 5 of the 7 churches for failing to manifest repentance! - Matt. 3:2; Matt. 4:17; Matt. 11:20; Matt. 11:21; Matt. 12:41; Mk. 1:15; Mk. 6:12; Lk. 10:13; Lk. 11:32; Lk. 13:3; Lk. 13:5; Lk. 15:7; Lk. 15:10; Lk. 16:30; Lk. 17:3; Lk. 17:4; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; Acts 8:22; Acts 17:30; Acts 26:20; 2 Co. 12:21; Rev. 2:5; Rev. 2:16; Rev. 2:21; Rev. 2:22; Rev. 3:3; Rev. 3:19; Rev. 9:20; Rev. 9:21; Rev. 16:9; Rev. 16:11

Impurity (167) **akatharsia** from **a** = without + **kathairo** = cleanse) is a broad term referring to moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed. It describes a state of moral impurity, especially sexual sin. The term **akatharsia** refers to filth or refuse. Paul's point here is that sin defiles us, producing corruption and degradation of the sinner. The sinner is never a winner! In Ephesians 4:19 **akatharsia** characterizes the unregenerate souls who "having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of **impurity**." In Eph 5:3 Paul said it was so despicable that "**impurity**...must not even be named among" the saints in Ephesus! In Col 3:5 Paul commands this sin to be killed! In 1Th 4:7 Paul writes "God has not called us for the purpose of **impurity**, but in sanctification." Notice in that passage **akatharsia** is the absolute antithesis of sanctification or holiness (**hagiasmos**)! **THOUGHT** - ARE YOU AS CONVICTED AS I AM? **Rod Mattoon** - The word **akatharsia** means everything which would hinder a man to enter into God's presence. It describes the life muddied with wallowing in the world's ways. It is the opposite of purity and considered one of the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). 10v - Matt. 23:27; Rom. 1:24; Rom. 6:19; 2 Co. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 2:3; 1 Thess. 4:7

Immorality (4202) **porneia** from root verb **pernao** = to sell, **porneuo** = to play the harlot; **pornos** = male prostitute; English = pornography) originally referred to any excessive behavior or lack of restraint, but eventually became associated with sexual excess and indulgence, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse. It refers to general sexual acts outside of legal marriage. Sex was often linked to pagan religious practice, with the idolatrous worship of false gods (TDNT) Loose morals were a continuous problem in the Greco-Roman world, so much so that **porneia** was an integral part of pagan religion (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). **24v** - Matt. 5:32; Matt. 15:19; Matt. 19:9; Mk. 7:21; Jn. 8:41; Acts 15:20; Acts 15:29; Acts 21:25; 1Co. 5:1; 1Co. 6:13; 1Co. 6:18; 1Co. 7:2; 2 Co. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:21; Rev. 9:21; Rev. 14:8; Rev. 17:2; Rev. 17:4; Rev. 18:3; Rev. 19:2

Sensuality (766) **aselgeia** from **aselges** = licentious <> **a** = negates next word + **selges** = continent) originally referred to any excess or lack of restraint but came to convey the idea of shameless excess and the absence of restraint, especially with sexual excess, especially public, unrestrained, flagrant, sexual sin. Thus like **koite**, **aselgeia** was used almost exclusively of especially lewd sexual immorality, of uninhibited and unabashed lasciviousness. It refers to the kind of sexual debauchery and abandonment that characterizes much of modern society and that is often flaunted almost as a badge of distinction! **Aselgeia** refers to uninhibited sexual indulgence without shame and without concern for what others think or how they may be affected (or infected). The Greeks defined **aselgeia** as "a disposition of soul that resents all discipline," as "a spirit that acknowledges no restraints, dares whatsoever its caprice and wanton insolence may suggest." **Sensuality** is one of the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:19), and characterizes the behavior of the unregenerate (Eph. 4:19), particularly false teachers (2Pe 2:2, 18; Jude 1:4). 10v - Mk. 7:22; Rom. 13:13; 2 Co. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 2:7; 2 Pet. 2:18; Jude 1:4

Practice (4238) **prasso** means doing something as a regular practice or as a routine habit, and is distinguished from **poieo** which means "to do" which focuses more on the end/achievement of the action. In contrast **prasso** focuses on the process or habitual effort to arrive at the end/achievement, and thus refers more to the course of conduct. (even the **present tense** of **poieo** expresses a series of repeated acts -- see note by Vine below). The predominant idea conveyed by **prasso** in its NT uses is to bring about or accomplish an objective through some activity (Ro 1:32, 2:3, Ac 5:35, 26:20, 2Co 5:10, etc). **Prassō** focuses on the activity (continued process) that brings the needed end. 36v - Lk. 3:13; Lk. 19:23; Lk. 22:23; Lk. 23:15; Lk. 23:41; Jn. 3:20; Jn. 5:29; Acts 3:17; Acts 5:35; Acts 15:29; Acts 16:28; Acts 17:7; Acts 19:19; Acts 19:36; Acts 25:11; Acts 25:25; Acts 26:9; Acts 26:20; Acts 26:26; Acts 26:31; Rom. 1:32; Rom. 2:1; Rom. 2:2; Rom. 2:3; Rom. 2:25; Rom. 7:15; Rom. 7:19; Rom. 9:11; Rom. 13:4; 1 Co. 9:17; 2 Co.

5:10; 2 Co. 12:21; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 4:11