

The Signs of an Apostle

Second Corinthians 12

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Prelude:

I. Remember that Paul's ministry among the Corinthians was to present them as a virgin to Christ.

II. His motive was that of love.

A. Others had presented themselves to the Corinthians as being equal to an apostle, but Paul showed that they were false teachers and false apostles.

B. He reminded the Corinthians of how he had suffered for Christ, which the false apostles had not done.

1. They sought to get something from the Corinthians,
2. whereas, Paul and his team gave to the Corinthians.

a) Paul did not take wages from them, but

b) as he will show in chapter 12, he spent and was spent for them.

Persuasion:

I. 12.1–6 • An Experience that Showed Paul as an Apostle

1 It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5 Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. 6 For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.

A. Why is it not profitable to boast?

1. What does the boaster get out of it?
2. Does he actually lose in some ways.

B. Why then did Paul boast?

1. In this case it was necessary, but
2. at the same time he shows something that humbled him.

C. Who would Paul be speaking of if not about himself in these verses?

D. Why did he write about himself in the third person?

1. He has already said that it is unprofitable to boast.
2. So I believe that he downplayed this as much as possible and one way to do that was speaking in the third person, as though someone else wrote these words.

E. Why did Paul write that this event happened 14 years previously?

1. It authenticated what happened.
2. He could point to an exact time and others could corroborate it.
3. Some believe he alludes to the event of Acts 14.19–20.

F. Why did he not know whether it was in the body or out of the body?

1. Acts 14 is not really clear in my mind as to whether he actually died.
2. It seems as though he did, but Luke wrote it in such a way that we are not sure, because he merely said that the ones who stoned him supposed him to be dead.

G. What is the third heaven?

1. The Bible often speaks of the “heavens,” such as at Genesis 1.1.
2. The first heaven would be the sky above us.
3. The second heaven would be space.
4. The third heaven would be beyond space.

H. What was another name that Paul gave the third heaven?

1. He called it Paradise.
2. He entered into heaven itself.

I. What did he hear?

1. Why were those words inexpressible or unlawful for a man to utter?

2. Why did he get to hear them?

a) This goes to the point of what Paul wrote here.

b) Why did he write this section?

(1) Remember that he was establishing his apostleship.

(2) The apostles had communication with God that no one else would or could have.

(3) Think of the Book of Revelation and what John saw and heard.

(a) John had a similar experience.

(b) The Lord told John to write what he saw and that would include what he heard, as Revelation shows – Rev 1.11.

(c) However, notice: Rev 10.1–4.

3. Why would God do this?

a) See Proverbs 25.2.

b) Why would God conceal?

(1) We could not and would not understand a full revelation of everything that can be known.

(2) This shows that He is God.

J. Do you find verse 5 confusing?

1. Paul did not want to boast of himself, but

2. he had to talk about himself, and

a) he conditioned it by stating

b) that he would boast in his infirmities.

(1) However, so far he has not mentioned those infirmities, but

(2) he will shortly.

(a) Notice that Paul did not speak of himself being great.

(b) Therefore, he simply spoke of what happened to him,

i) although he realized that some might see it as boasting.

ii) He was not boasting.

II. 12.7–10 • An Apostle, But Humble

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- A. This shows that the previous six verses were about Paul’s heavenly experience.
- B. Why did the abundance of the revelations necessitate that a messenger of Satan be sent to Paul?
1. He may have been tempted to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, because
 2. he had an experience that other Christians do not have.
 - a) Therefore, he may have been tempted to think that he was greater than other disciples of Christ.
 - b) However, the Lord wanted Paul to remain humble.
- C. Why did Paul ask the Lord three times for Him to remove the thorn?
1. Why not just ask once?
 2. Has not the Lord repeatedly told us to pray often for the things we want?
- D. What answer did Paul receive from the Lord?
1. What did the Lord mean by His answer?
 2. Paul needed God’s grace, not perfect health.
 3. How is the Lord’s strength perfected through human weakness?
 - a) Consider most of the Old Testament stories.
 - b) See especially Judges 7.2.

- E. Paul finally explained why he boasted in his infirmities.
1. He actually took pleasure in them.
 2. How could he take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, and in distresses?
 - a) That was when Christ shined in his life.
 - b) Christ shining in his life is what Paul life was about.

III. 12.11–12 • The Signs of an Apostle

11 I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. 12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

- A. Paul realized how this so-called boasting made him look.
1. However, why did he do it?
 2. What should the Corinthians have been doing?
- B. Was Paul behind the other apostles, even the most eminent ones?
- C. What was Paul's opinion of himself?
- D. What are the signs of an apostle?
1. Compare Mark 16.20 and Hebrews 2.1–5.
 2. See also Exodus 4.30–31.

IV. 12.13 • Was the Corinthian Church Inferior?

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

- A. How would not supporting Paul financially make the Corinthian Church inferior?
1. They could not lay claim to the fruit that he bore.
 2. See Philippians 4.17.

V. 12.14–15 • Spending and Being Spent

14 Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. 15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.

A. Notice again that Paul did not seek anything from the Corinthians.

1. No one could charge him with establishing the church there for his own financial benefit.
2. When he went to them again, he would not be a burden to them.
 - a) Why would he not be a burden to them?
 - b) What did he seek?

B. In his illustration about the parents and the children, who is who?

C. Did Paul regret spending and being spent for the Corinthians?

1. However, the more he so spent, was he blessed?
2. No, and the proof of that is this letter.

VI. 12.16–18 • Open to Criticism

16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! 17 Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?

A. Whatever the situation, he did not burden them.

B. Notice how he opened himself up for any criticism.

VII. 12.19–21 • For Edifying the Brethren

19 Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification. 20 For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of

wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; 21 lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.

A. For what did Paul do all things?

B. What did Paul fear?

Exhortation:

I. Do you take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses?

II. Do you generally look out for others, or do you expect others to look out for you?

III. Have you been blessed?

A. If so, how do you tell others about it?

B. Do you do it to boast or to show others that they can also be blessed?

IV. What are you willing to do for your brethren?