

## II CORINTHIANS 12:1-21

### REVIEW...

- **I CORINTHIANS 10 - THE PROBLEM OF THE FALSE TEACHERS - JUDAIZERS...**
  - Judaizers were religious teachers from Judah - who taught you had to keep the Law...
  - In order to fight and win the battle - Paul needed the right weapons - Word of God...
- **I CORINTHIANS 11:1-15 - DO NOT BE DECEIVED...**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> - Learn the lesson of Eve - Satan is trying to get us to question the Word of God...
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> - Not all leaders are alike - the false ones demand money...
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> - Watch out for the Angel of light - they try to deceive by looking like the real thing...
- **I CORINTHIANS 11:16-33 - BOASTING IN THE LORD...**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> - Boasting is foolishness - we have nothing we have not received from God...
    - But since the church in Corinth liked to put up with the boasting of the Judaizers..
    - Men who enslaved them - stole - and slapped them - Paul would also boast...
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> - The boasting of Paul...
    - Judaizers boasted they were Jews - so was Paul - not that it mattered - **Philippians 3:7**
    - The Judaizers boasted they were ministers - Paul more so - shown in his hardships...
    - 1<sup>st</sup> - Paul was always in trouble for the Gospel - but it was worth the cost!
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> - Always in danger for the Gospel - but nothing could keep Paul from preaching Jesus!
    - 3<sup>rd</sup> - Paul suffered for the Gospel - because he loved and cared for God's people!
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> - Boasting in the Lord...
    - If Paul boasted - he boasted in his weakness - so men would not look to him...
    - He knew the Gospel was not about Paul - but the Good News of Jesus Christ!

### STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS... (3 THINGS)

- **1<sup>ST</sup> - BOASTING IN VISIONS... vs. 1-6**
  - Though boasting really served no purpose - Paul went on to boast in his visions... vs. 1
    - Paul had received many different vision and revelations from the Lord...
    - The Gospel message itself was not given to Paul by a man...
    - **Galatians 1:11-12** - "The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man... but through the revelation of Jesus..."
    - While on his way to persecute and kill Christians in Damascus - Jesus met Paul...
    - **Acts 9** - Paul heard the Good News from Jesus Himself - and was saved!
  - The greatest of Paul's visions - was of heaven itself...
    - Paul told the church - 'I knew a man'...
      - Paul is hesitant to admit the vision he is talking about - was his own experience...
      - He refers to himself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person - 'I knew a man' - in an effort of humility...
    - 14 years before he wrote the letter to the church - Paul was taken to the 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven...
      - The 1<sup>st</sup> heaven - is the sky above us / the 2<sup>nd</sup> heaven is outer space...
      - The location Paul describes - the 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven - is the dwelling place of God...
    - Paul did not know if he was physically there - or if he had died...
      - Likely this experience is the result of Paul being stoned to death - **Acts 14**

- He died and went to heaven - but apparently God was not done with Paul...
- So God sent him back down - and Paul was revived...
- We never have any reason to fear when we are serving the Lord...
- We will not leave this world one moment before the Lord calls us home...
- If God is not done with us yet - He can even send us back if He need to!
- There in 'Paradise' Paul heard things he was forbidden to repeat...
  - The suggestion is that what Paul heard was too wonderful to put into words...
  - **I Corinthians 2:9** - "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
  - Heaven is not the most amazing place we could imagine - beyond our imagination!
  - It will take ages - literally 1000s of years - in heaven for God to reveal it all to us!
  - **Ephesians 2:7** - "In the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."
- o Though Paul certainly could have boasted about this - he would not...
  - Paul had already seen what could happen...
    - In Lystra they had called him a god because he healed a lame man - **Act 14**...
    - In Malta they thought Paul was a god because a viper did not kill him - **Acts 27**...
    - Imagine what people would have done if they knew Paul had been to heaven!
  - Paul knew he was just a man - and did not want people depending on him...
    - People tend to put spiritual leaders / pastors up on a pedestal...
    - There is the impression they are somehow bigger / more holy - than others...
    - The danger in men looking to a person/pastor - is that they will fail...
    - And if we have put our faith in a flawed man - rather than in a perfect Lord...
    - When the man stumbles - makes a mistake - we will fall with him!
- **2<sup>ND</sup> - BOASTING IN WEAKNESS... vs. 7-10**
  - o To keep Paul from being prideful - God gave him a thorn... vs. 7-8
    - God had blessed Paul with an abundance of revelations and visions...
      - There was a very real temptation for Paul to become arrogant - prideful...
      - So God gave him a thorn - a 'messenger of satan' - to keep him humble...
    - We are not sure what Paul's thorn was - he does not elaborate...
      - Some believe it was a physical problem...
        - o We do know that Paul had a problem with his eyes - **Galatians 4:15**...
        - o That is why Paul did not personally write any of his letters...
        - o Other men wrote down the letters as Paul dictated it to them...
      - Some believe it might have been a problem with a person...
        - o Paul was a Pharisee - perhaps a member of the Sanhedrin - **Acts 26:10**
        - o You had to have a wife in order to be on the ruling counsel of Israel...
        - o But when he wrote this letter he was no longer married - **I Corinthians 7:7**...
        - o Perhaps his wife died - or perhaps she left him because of his faith in Jesus...
        - o A bitter ex-wife would be a difficult thorn for the apostle to carry around...
      - Some believe it could also have been a temptation...
        - o Paul was an ordinary man - he undoubtedly faced temptations just like us...

- o Perhaps tempted by women / or money / or even fame and glory...
- Whatever it was - it was bad enough Paul called it - 'a messenger of satan'...
  - o I like that we do not know for sure what the thorn was...
  - o Because each one of us likely had our own version of a 'thorn'...
  - o Maybe it is a physical problem - a pain or discomfort we live with every day...
  - o Or we might have a person in our life - which we just wished would go away...
  - o Or it could be a temptation - something that is a constant struggle for us...
  - o And we do not understand why God does not just remove it from our lives!
- o Paul asked God three times to take away this 'thorn'... vs. 9-10
  - And three times God answered and told him no - the thorn stayed...
    - Jesus also asked three times in the Garden for God to take away His 'thorn' - cross...
    - **Hebrews 5:8** - "Though a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things he suffered..."
    - Often God does not take away problems - He may even allow them to get worse...
    - When hard times come - our first reaction is to look to depend on us...
    - But God can 'turn up the heat' - till we can no longer handle our problems...
  - So we learn God's grace is enough...
    - If everything in life were perfect - Paul would not depend on the Lord...
    - He would have been left to depend on - be limited to his own abilities...
    - Our efforts - our abilities - are often what 'limits' the work of God...
    - When we trust in ourselves - our abilities - our understanding - we are weak...
  - But in our weakness - God's strength is perfect ...
    - We pride ourselves in our strength - but what is our strength compared to God's...
    - Strength does not come from money / power / influence / even who you know...
    - True strength comes when we realize we are not strong - in fact we are weak...
    - The problem is we are limited - limited time / talent / money / ability...
    - But God had limitless - He has all the time / talent / money we could ever need!
    - In realizing this - we don't depend on our strength - we depend on the Lord's!
    - When we look to the Lord - depend upon the Lord - we are unstoppable!
  - Rejoicing in troubles...
    - Therefore Paul said he boasted in his weakness - so he could display Jesus' power!
    - So when Paul was insulted / persecuted / in need / or in trouble - he was happy...
    - Because when the problems came - he knew in his weakness he was strongest!
    - We often get into the most trouble in life when we think we are all right in life...
    - That is when satan can sneak in - because we are most vulnerable...
    - We are depending on our strength - we are not clinging to Jesus...
    - **I Corinthians 10:12** - "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."
    - So next time life seems to fall apart - start rejoicing - God is keeping you strong...
- **3<sup>RD</sup> - THE HEART OF A FATHER... VS. 11-21**
  - o Paul was embarrassed by his 'boasting'... vs. 11-13
    - There should have been no need - the church should have been boasting about Paul...
      - Paul was no less of an Apostle in any way - Paul had patiently proved himself ...
      - Apparently he had done mighty signs and wonders at the church...

- None are recorded for us by Paul - likely because he did not want to boast...
- We can assume they were much the same as those recorded in the book of Acts...
- Paul - healed the sick / cast out demons / even raised the dead!
- Paul did not record his own signs and wonders - because he knew he was nothing...
  - **Proverbs 27:2** - "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips..."
  - If you come across a teacher/pastor who loves to talk about his 'mighty works'...
  - You might want to leave - and go attend another church...
  - God may use us - and even do incredible works through us - but...
  - We get any credit for the work - all the credit and glory should go to God!
- o One thing Paul was not - a burden to the church - 2 reasons... vs. 14-19
  - 1<sup>st</sup> - Paul did not want to 'numb' the church with constant requests for money...
    - Paul had never allowed the church to support him financially...
    - The 1<sup>st</sup> time when he established the church / the 2<sup>nd</sup> before the severe letter...
    - Now Paul would come to Corinth for a 3<sup>rd</sup> visit - and it would be the same...
    - When people constantly are asking for money - it wears down the people...
    - You start to dread the pastor coming by - opening his mouth...
    - It numbs you to the Word - because you assume he is just talking about money!
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> - Because children should not take care of their father...
    - Paul was not interested in what he could get from the church...
      - o He was coming because of his great love for the people in the church!
      - o In fact Paul was willing to SPEND all he had for the church...
      - o He would have given them his last peso / his last ounce of strength...
    - Even though he knew the more he loved them - the less he would be loved...
      - o A good father is willing to do anything for his kids - so they grow up strong...
      - o But Dads have to put up with a time when their kids do not appreciate them...
      - o We call them the 'teen years' - no matter what a Dad does it is not enough...
      - o And the church of Corinth was going through those 'teen' years...
      - o It is easy to love someone - if they love you back - are a blessing to you...
      - o How about if they spit in your face - if no matter what you do it is not enough...
      - o The mark of the Love of Jesus is even being able to love your enemies!
      - o **Luke 6:27** - "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you..."
- o Excuses to cover up sin... vs. 20-21
  - Paul was still being accused of taking advantage of the church...
    - He challenged them to explain how - Paul had never taken any money from them...
    - All who came with Paul - Titus / brother - never took any money (*same spirit*)...
    - Paul was not saying this to defend his actions - he was preparing the church...
  - When he came he was afraid of what he would find - a church sinking in sin...
    - Full of jealousy / quarreling / anger / selfishness / gossip / immorality...
    - All the problems Paul had addressed in his first epistle - still a problem...
  - The accusations being made against Paul - were an attempt to divert their guilt...
    - Paul was not going to be distracted - he would love them too much to let the sin slide!
    - Like a father to a rebellious teenager - he would correct the church when he came...
    - When people are caught up in sin - and do not want to change...

- They will try and pass their guilt onto others - blame them to feel better...
- To try and take the focus off of them - so people do not see their sin...
- But in the end we must be willing to overlook the attacks - insults...
- Love people enough to confront their sin - so they can be restored to Jesus!