

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

¹ I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ² 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. ³ And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. ⁵ I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, ⁷ or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, 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.

Notes:

- Paul speaks in the third person of his revelatory experience 14 yrs ago. We have multiple accounts of visions and revelations Paul had in the book of Acts (9:3-19; 11:25-26; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21). None of these lines up neatly with 2 Cor. 12 for it probably best aligns with the three years we know little about between his conversion and visit to Jerusalem (Acts. 9:26-30).
- Consistent with Paul’s theme of foolish boasting in his weaknesses, he is reluctant to speak of his visions and revelations. Its clear we can infer the “super apostles” boasted of their own “revelations.”
- Much speculation has surrounded Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” Its best to focus on *the purpose* it served than speculating about *what* it was.

Questions

1. Do you tend to be skeptical of special spiritual experiences or open to and trusting of them? Why?
2. Its clear Paul is reluctant to speak of his revelations from God. How can spiritual experiences become a source of pride? How can our knowledge of scripture or theology be a source of pride?
3. In what areas of your life are you tempted to be conceited? How does the sufficiency of God’s grace help to humble your heart in those specific areas?
4. How God uses us can become a source of conceit. How is God at work to humble you to rely on him to find strength in Christ, instead of yourself?