

2 Corinthians 12:2-10^{vi}

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven— whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person— whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, or I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

^{vi} **About 2 Corinthians 12:2-10**

The severe tone of the last chapters of 2 Corinthians (chaps. 10-13) differs so sharply from the peaceful theme of chapters 1-9, which speak of conflicts now resolved, that most scholars believe that chapters 10-13 originally were separate. Many suggest that they may be all or part of the earlier letter written “out of much distress” (2:4) between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Or these chapters may have been the body of a later letter, sent after receiving discouraging news of the Corinthian congregation.

In chapters 10-13, Paul defends himself with bitter irony against certain “super-apostles”

(11:5) who ridicule his unimpressive physical appearance and speaking style (10:10) and his refusal to take money (11:7-11, 12:13-18). They prove their authority by their Jewish descent (11:22), their signs (12:12), and their “visions and revelations” (12:1). For them, authority equals power (11:20).

Although Paul can and does make equivalent claims, as in today's reading, to do so is to speak “as a fool” (11:21, 12:11). By describing his revelation in the third person, Paul distances himself from this experience—it is a personal matter, not the basis for his apostolic authority. Instead, as a counterpart, he is afflicted with “a thorn...in the flesh” (v. 7). The exact nature of the thorn is not specified. It may have been a physical or emotional illness or an external affliction such as the opposition of his fellow Jews. But Paul's authority as a true apostle is revealed through such weakness. The end Paul seeks, that is, the evidence of his authority, is revealed by the Lord paradoxically by means Paul does not at first recognize.