

Lesson Twelve

(11:16 — 12:18)

SECTION XVIII 11:16 — 12:10

16 I repeat, let no one think me foolish; but even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. 17 (What I am saying I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool, in this boastful confidence; 18 since many boast of worldly things, I too will boast.) 19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. 21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever any one dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews

the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie. 32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.

12 I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man 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. 3 And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise — whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows — 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. 6 Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. 7 And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; 9 but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

V. 16 — This verse picks up the idea of v. 1, that of the boasting that Paul was forced to do, which he termed foolishness. He only

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did this to show up his opponents and argued that rather than commending himself in such a fashion, the Corinthians should have done so, 3:1ff., 12:11.

The sentiment here is about like that of v. 1 and v. 4.

V. 17 — Any kind of self-aggrandizement would be boasting in something other than Jesus, and not according to the Lord's will. However, too many of those in Corinth were babes rather than men, I Corinthians 3:1ff, Hebrews 5:11-14.

V. 18 — **of worldly things** — *κατὰ σάρκα*, which was a major problem in Corinth.

V. 19 — Rather ironical, but Paul argued that they have put up with the false apostles, and they should put up with him (even as a fool, though they be wise!?!). See the same sentiment expressed in I Corinthians 4:7-8. True wisdom would be to glory only in Christ, and to consider oneself as actually foolish in comparison with God's wisdom, I Corinthians 3:18. See I Corinthians 4:10-14.

V. 20 — Evidently some of those false apostles had been so overbearing that only such a description as this would fit. It is interesting to wonder if Titus brought such information as this back. Note such texts as Romans 16:17-18; I Timothy 3:3. Such a relationship as here described would hardly be Christian brother to brother, but rather more like Master/slave. It would surely not describe an apostle of Christ, who was characterized by "meekness and gentleness" in 10:1.

V. 21 — Paul was not "strong" in such ways as these above, nor did he wish to be. Rather his power/authority over them, such as it was, was for the express purpose of building up, 12:19; 13:10.

V. 22 — Hebrews/Israelites/descendants = various ways of viewing a "true-blue" "all wool and a yard wide" Jew.

V. 23 — **servants of Christ** — The apostle does not deny that these now being considered are servants of Jesus. Of course it is possible that this was their claim, and not actually true, since they were really servants of Satan.

The remainder of this chapter pictures what a servant of Christ must be, and delineates the "privileges" said servant had. Doubtless the picture painted was different than that of his opponents.

As we consider these various things, it is rather noticeable how little we really know of Paul's life. The time of writing is about A.D. 57, which puts us about Acts ch. 19. So it is evident that Luke's history, while adequate for its purpose, is hardly complete.

Viewing the various things listed in vs. 23-27, both physical and mental sufferings are evident. The perils of travel and those from people are likewise evident. See again I Corinthians 4:7-13; II Corinthians 4:7-11; 6:4-10. We will bypass discussion of the various

"weaknesses" since they are rather clearly understood.

V. 28 — Perhaps in contrast to those "super apostles" in Corinth who cared only for themselves, Paul as a real apostle felt the daily burden of concern for churches near and far, including Corinth; here designated as the thing "within" and apart from all the other items mentioned which were things "without." It is interesting too that the word he used (*μερίμνα*) is also found in Philippians 4:6 where he advised not to be so. Jesus used it in Matthew 13:22 to describe "seed" that did not bear fruit. Martha was of like mind, Luke 10:41; while the apostles were not to be so, Luke 12:11. In the same vein, Matthew 6:25ff. and Luke 12:22ff. enjoin all disciples not to be anxious, but to cast all anxieties upon God, who cares for them, I Peter 5:7. Sometimes it is hard to practice what one knows is right.

daily pressure — The Greek term was used by Paul in Acts 24:12 in reference to "stirring" up a crowd. Here is depicted the true heart of a shepherd and an apostle. While he would not "lord it over their faith" (1:24) yet he did feel as a father, and as a brother in faith, one who had presented them to Christ, (11:2) and held them in his heart (6:11; 7:3).

V. 29 — **weak** — See the complete listing of all its occurrences at the end of the book. The term means/signifies a deficiency of some sort, and often is used in a context in comparison with such terms or concepts as healthy/strong/righteous/sinless, etc.

made to fall — The Greek term means to sin, as in Matthew 18:6-7; Luke 17:1; Romans 11:9; 14:13; I Corinthians 8:13; Galatians 5:11; I John 2:10. Like the sentiment in I Corinthians 9:22, Paul made every effort to place himself in the other person's shoes, so that he might more effectively help. Implied is that any true apostle would do the same. Now read Galatians 6:1-5; Jude, vs. 22, 23.

V. 30 — **weakness** — The things as above (which were not true of his opponents), or such as next mentioned, vs. 32-33, or his "stake in the flesh," 12:7-10; all these made him depend on Christ rather than himself (and thus human achievements). Note Philippians 4:13.

V. 31 — If the preceding recital of events was hard to believe, certainly the event in 12:1-6 would be so. Thus, the need to impress upon his readers that he was mindful that God was to judge him, and what he wrote must then be the truth.

V. 32 — Aretas IV was Chief of the Arabs known as Nabateans. Herod Antipater had married his daughter, then divorced her to marry Herodias. Aretas was offended and engaged Herod in war, defeating him. Evidently Damascus was ruled by Aretas for awhile during this period, somewhere around A.D. 37-39.

Acts 9 shows that the Jews were participants in this episode that

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was clearly a shameful memory to Paul.

V. 33 — **basket** — A large basket of rope, such as was used to pick up the remnants after the feeding of the 4,000, Matthew 15:37.

12:1 — **I must boast** — Simply because of the weaknesses of the church.

nothing to be gained — Evidently to be taken in connection with v. 12. What he was now writing about himself really was not the standard by which apostleship should be judged, since such a procedure was more worldly in nature, and pandered to the carnality of men.

visions and revelations — This incident closely following that of 11:32-33 (which must have robbed Paul of much dignity) is seemingly written to show the fact that he had received supernatural things as well as those just mentioned. Such supernatural events as this one would offset any such like claims of his opposers (i.e., "if you have had supernatural experiences, so have I.").

V. 2 — **fourteen years** — Some think this was the time of stoning at Lystra, but that view is unprovable, and rather unlikely. It could have just been a special event in his life.

was caught up — It is useless to speculate how this happened, since Paul doesn't know.

third heaven = Paradise, v. 3. We have only speculation about "third heaven" and Paradise. Jewish thought and/or Greek ideas about heaven could be mentioned, but who knows which, if any were used, or that Paul so believed? The point of the experience in our text is to reveal one of the ways God had exalted Paul, and to put in vivid contrast the humbling, continuous experiences such as in 11:32-33; 12:7-9.

V. 4 — **things that cannot be told** — Whether he was not to tell, or couldn't find words for it as a man, is not too clear; but unimportant for the illustration.

V. 5 — **of this man** — Seemingly of "Paul the apostle" who was such only by the grace of God and not by anything of man. As is evident, "Paul the man" was to be viewed only in "weakness." Some have questioned if Paul is speaking of himself or of someone else. The illustration is hardly relevant unless it is about Paul.

V. 6 — Again, judgment of Paul should have been done on things other than now being mentioned, although nothing revealed about him has been untrue.

V. 7 — **thorn** — The Greek term is for "stake" or "splinter," and so a thorn. No one knows what was meant, but Paul considered it as a leveling factor in his life, a means to bring into focus the part that God wanted to play in his life.

messenger of Satan — ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ. Paul was perhaps like unto Job in this instance. We might consider the supposition that God gave it, or permitted it, etc., but no solution is possible.

V. 8 — **three times** — From this text, and others, we get the idea that repetition of a prayer is not wrong per se. It is vain repetition (i.e., meaningless because of one's attitudes) that Jesus forbids in Matthew 6:2ff. As is obvious from Jesus' own example in Mark 14:35ff., and that of Paul in Romans 1:9-10, repetition is not bad. The parable in Luke 18:1ff. is on the same point.

V. 9 — **my grace is sufficient** — Not "will be" or "was" sufficient, but "is" sufficient. Cf. Hebrews 2:10, Philippians 4:13. Notice how all-encompassing is the word "grace."

is made perfect — God's power is perfected in endurance of affliction, Romans 5:2ff.; 8:31-39.

boast of my weaknesses — Because it is in such that God rather than man is to be seen. Pleasure in pain, as such, is not good but suspect. In Paul's case, it was unto a greater purpose, that of serving Christ and displaying the power of God. Therefore, the sufferings were to be viewed in that light.

power of Christ — "may be spread, as it were, a tent upon me." The imagery is like that of the Old Testament pillar of cloud/fire that rested upon the tabernacle. It is also like the idea of spreading a tent over someone.

V. 10 — **I am content** — Paul had to learn (Phil. 4:11) this state of mind as it does not come naturally. The people in Hebrews 10:32ff. were likeminded.

when I am weak — It will be good to recall I Corinthians 1:25ff. here. The cross was God's "weakness" as men viewed it, at least until converted; then it became the strength of God unto salvation.

QUESTIONS:

91. What drove Paul to boasting about self?
92. How did Paul describe (at least) one servant of Christ?
93. What was Paul's purpose in his choices for boasting?
94. What do you understand by the statements in v. 29?
95. For what reason did Paul mention the experience in 12:2-4?
96. In what did Paul learn to boast? Why?

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SECTION XIX 12:11-18

11 I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I am not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing, 12 The signs of a true apostle, were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. 13 For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? 16 But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by guile. 17 Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

V. 11 — **I have been a fool** — They forced him because too many had the standards of men as their standards. "Sin in the camp" was the most of Paul's problem, as we shall see in vs. 20-21.

inferior — The Greek term (as in 11:9) *ὕστερον*.

V. 12 — **signs** — Assumed here is our own perception of what would be "true" and "false." Paul seemed to make much of the fact that they had been sinners (I Cor. 6:9-11) but were now saved, and all because he was a true apostle. In the terms of II Corinthians 3, they were his recommendation.

signs, wonders, mighty works — As in Acts 2:22 of Jesus, Hebrews 2:4 of God working through apostles. Of course, nothing of man could actually make anyone an apostle of Jesus, I Corinthians 4:3; Galatians 1:1; etc. They had their own salvation through him rather than anyone else, and it was through what Paul preached that their salvation would remain, I Corinthians 15:1-4.

V. 13 — **Forgive me this wrong** — Maybe Paul is ironical here, maybe not. The Greek term, *ἀδικία*, is commonly used of sin, as in Luke 16:8, 9; 18:6; Romans 6:13; I John 5:17. He will attempt to justify his position in v. 14. As can be seen, the failure of the Corinthians to pay Paul as a laborer worthy of his wages, and his refusal to accept pay, worked against all of them. It is a good lesson for churches and preachers to consider.

I seek . . . you — The key to any discipleship is here — if one's mind is not totally submissive to Christ, discipleship is a difficult task. Naturally, the principle here stated is desired in any close relationship, such as marriage, in the sense that complete commitment is desired. Notice then the texts in Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22 — 4:1.

parents — Mentioned in I Corinthians 4. Paul felt that their particular relationship permitted him to refuse help from them if he so desired, even though from others who were also "his children" he could accept help.

V. 15 — Paul's commitment to them was such that all he was and possessed was theirs. Jesus set the example for such giving, as Paul often pointed out. Certain it was that his independence of them did not mean he did not love them. He attempted to love them unselfishly. Sometimes love can be too demanding, too possessive. God loves us, even with a "jealous" love, but not so possessively that we cannot be ourselves. The interesting thing about the cross is its winsomeness in spite of the sacrifice, and this is so because it was an unselfish act, only asking our love in return, yet not making us cease to be ourselves, but rather helping us to be what we really can, and desire, to be.

V. 16 — Some were hard to convince, and though granting that Paul had not personally "used" them, he was rather doing it through someone else. He now refutes that objection, asserting that he had not deceived them, and neither had "Titus or the brother" sent from Paul, as they well knew.

QUESTIONS:

97. In what way was Paul a fool?
98. Had God given Paul the credentials of a true apostle?
99. What right do parents have?
100. Had some accused Paul of deceitfulness?