

# Studies in

## 2 Corinthians



Lesson XX

**Text:** 2 Corinthians 11:21-2:10 (NLT)

<sup>11:21</sup> But whatever they dare to boast about—I'm talking like a fool again—I dare to boast about it, too. <sup>22</sup> Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. <sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again.

<sup>24</sup> Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. <sup>26</sup> I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. <sup>27</sup> I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

<sup>28</sup> Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger? <sup>30</sup> If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. <sup>31</sup> God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying. <sup>32</sup> When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas kept guards at the city gates to catch me. <sup>33</sup> I had to be lowered in a basket through a window in the city wall to escape from him.

<sup>12:1</sup> This boasting will do no good, but I must go on. I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I<sup>[a]</sup> was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don't know—only God knows. <sup>3</sup> Yes, only God knows whether I was in my body or outside my body. But I do know <sup>4</sup> that I was caught up<sup>[b]</sup> to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.

<sup>5</sup> That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup> If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, <sup>7</sup> even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

<sup>8</sup> Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. <sup>9</sup> Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. <sup>10</sup> That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

## FOOTNOTES

- a. 12:2 Greek *I know a man in Christ who.*  
b. 12:4 Greek *But I know such a man, <sup>4</sup>that he was caught up.*

## Discussion Questions

1. In chapter 11 and 12, Paul assumes the point of view of his opponents—just long enough to demonstrate the foolishness of boasting about human achievement. What three things did Paul have in common with his opponents? (vs. 22).
2. In Philippians 3:1-11, Paul provides a more extended version of the credentials mentioned in vs. 22 of our text. How do these passages help us to keep our earthly assets and accomplishments into perspective?
3. What trials and tribulations did Paul go through in his effort to spread the Gospel and establish the church? (vv 24-33)
4. What “point of pride” does Paul reluctantly share in chapter 12, verses 1-4?

### A Closer Look at the Third Heaven

The third heaven is a spiritual division of the universe within Judeo-Christian cosmology. In the Old Testament it was known as the *shamayi h'shamayim* (יַמֵּשׁ הַשָּׁמַיִם)—the “Heaven of Heavens.” According to Genesis 28:12, Deuteronomy 10:14 and 1 Kings 8:27 the third heaven is the dwelling place of Yahweh God and his angels. It is distinct from the first heaven (the earth’s atmosphere or “firmament”) and the second heaven (the expanse of the stars).

5. How does Paul’s attitude toward his vision compare to those who claim to have visions of heaven today? (vv 4-6)
6. What unlikely “messenger” did God send Paul? Why? (vs. 7)
7. How can we, like Paul, come to a place of acceptance about the things we cannot change? (vv 8-10).