

Text: 2 Cor 12.1-21

2 Corinthians:

Opening (1.1-11)

Addressing Corinthian Perceptions and Paul's Ministry Philosophy (1.12-7.16)

Defending Paul's Conduct (1.12-2.17)

Exposition of Paul's Philosophy (3.1-6.10)

Appeal for Corinthian confidence (6.11-7.16)

Instructions concerning the offering (8.1-9.15)

Assertion of apostolic authority (10.1-13.10)

Conclusion (13.11-14)¹

In the concluding section of 2 Corinthians Paul changes his tone.

In part 1, he carefully reasons out his defense.

In part 2, he reminds them diplomatically.

In part 3, he strongly asserts his authority.

"Some writers refer to 11:1–12:13 as Paul's 'Fool's Speech' because of the recurring foolishness terminology in this passage (*aphrosyne*, *aphron*, *paraphron*; cf. 11:1, 16 [twice], 17, 19, 23; 12:11, 16)."²

"Paul had cited his freedom to minister without the Corinthians' financial support, as well as his sufferings in ministry, as grounds for boasting. He next mentioned, in this section, the special visions and revelations that God had granted him. He referred to these here in order to further bolster his readers' confidence in his apostolic calling and authority."³

I. The Fool's Speech continued: visions and revelations (1-6)

Why does Paul say, "boasting is necessary" in v. 1?

Paul feels the need to boast to win over the Corinthian minority still in opposition to him

¹ Adapted from Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003).

² Constable, 2 Cor 11.1.

³ Constable, 2 Cor 12.1.

Compare 2-4 with vv. 7-9. Who is the “man” Paul mentions? Why does he speak this way?

The man is Paul himself, he refers to himself this way out of humility

What does Paul mean by “in the body” or “out of the body”? (2, 3)

He doesn't know if he merely saw a vision or if he was transported to heaven

What is the “third heaven”? (2)

The presence of God

What experience did Paul have in this vision/translation? (4)

He heard a personal message he wasn't allowed to deliver

Timing: when did this vision occur? (2)

Fourteen years ago, or about AD 42, most likely date for 2 Cor is AD 56. This means the vision occurred when Paul was in Tarsus, before the 1st Missionary Journey

As Paul winds this section down, what does he mean by vv. 5-6?

He mentions his experience indirectly as he is unwilling to boast of his experiences — he wants the Corinthians to take Paul's message at face value rather than make himself out to be a celebrity

II. The Fool's Speech tempered: the thorn in the flesh (7-10)

What does Paul say God gave him to keep him dependent and humble? (7)

A thorn in the flesh

What is this thorn in the flesh? (7)

Some kind of physical ailment or debility that kept him humble and dependent on God

Where did the thorn in the flesh come from? (7)

From Satan (compare Job)

What did Paul do about this trouble? (8)

Paul prayed three times for its removal

What was God's answer? Why did he give this answer? (9)

God said No, so that Paul would learn to glorify God through this affliction

What did Paul concluded about this trouble? (13)

He made up his mind to glorify God in all his troubles, his strength came from God

"This is one of the most important lessons every ambassador of Jesus Christ must learn. Both natural weakness and supernatural power are constantly at work in us, as they were in Paul and in Jesus. The Cross is the greatest example of divine power working through human weakness. ... Someone has said that Christians live on promises, not explanations. This is one of the greatest promises that God has given us to live on.⁴

III. The Fool's Speech concluded (12-13)

What does Pau have to say about his foolish speech in v. 12?

They compelled him to it by their behaviour

What does Paul assert in vv. 12b-13, "even though I am a nobody"?

He asserted his legitimate apostleship, proven by signs and wonders and miracles – he had no real need to boast about himself

Paul says he didn't treat the Corinthians differently than any other church, except one thing. What was that? (13)

Paul didn't expect or receive financial support from them

IV. Paul's plans to visit again (14-18)

Paul mentions this visit is his third. What were the other two visits to Corinth?

The church-planting visit, Acts 18 and the painful visit (2 Cor 2.1-3)

What does Paul announce in v. 15? Why does he call himself a "crafty fellow" in v. 16?

He will continue his policy of refusing money from them, showing how crafty he is

⁴ Constable, 2 Cor 12.9.

What does he offer of evidence of his “crafty” policy? (17-18)

None of his co-workers accepted money from Corinth either

V. Paul's spiritual point for the foolish speech (19-21)

Why did Paul indulge in “foolishness”? (19)

To build them up for their spiritual good

What was Paul afraid of in v. 20?

That they would continue to fight with him when he arrived

What else was Paul afraid of? (21)

That he would be humiliated (likely before other Christians traveling with him) and would mourn their disobedience