

CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 28

Authentic Apostles

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness"

2 COR.12:9 (NAS)

Study 28a: SUFFERING SERVANTS (11:16-33)

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.
Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.*

PROV.26:4,5 (NIV)

11:16-22 What 'boasting in the flesh' prompted this torrent from Paul? [cf. Philippians ch.3]

[11:16-18] I confess to you that when I read words like these, I cannot get away from the thought that in all the nearly fifty years that I have known Christ as my Saviour, and during almost all that time I have been trying to preach His Word, I have just been playing at Christianity. [Ironsides 241]

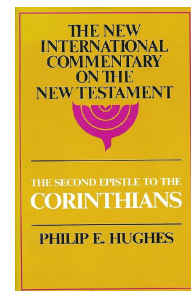
Did Paul 'convert' from Jew to Christian?

[11:24,25] If Paul had said, You have no authority over me; I am a Christian, and you cannot judge me and pronounce sentence upon me; I will appeal to Rome, he could have been free from all this. He did this when Caesar's own officers would have violated the law, but when his own brethren, the Jews, pronounced judgment against him, he bowed his head and took it because of his love for them. He said, "I became a Jew, that I might gain the Jews" (1 Cor. 9:20). If you want to see how much Paul loved the Jews, you can do so there as you see him tied to that post, with his back bare. Notice his quivering flesh as the thongs come down upon him. And he could have been delivered from it all if he had simply said, "I am no longer a Jew; I am a Christian." But although he was a Christian he could not forget that by birth he was a Jew, and he loved his people. We hear him say on another occasion, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1). And so he even bore the synagogue's discipline [39 stripes] in order that he might not be alienated from the people he loved and served and suffer for, "that they might be saved." [Ironsides 246,247]

[11:20-21] The Corinthians bear with the boastful intruders who visit their church and dictate to them, treat them as **slaves**, live at their expense, put on superior **airs** among them and generally insult and humiliate them. [Bruce 240]

11:23-25a Of true servants of Christ (of apostolic station) it may be said as it was of Isaiah's 'suffering servant' – "He hath poured out His soul unto death" (ASK THE WITNESS: Have any of your leaders this literal mark of authority? - Rev.11:7; 13:15)

[11:23] ... suffering was an integral and authenticating aspect of Paul's apostolic ministry, and had been from the very first. Thus even at his conversion the Lord said to Ananias: "I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16), and in the year following the writing of this epistle Paul tells the elders from Ephesus: "The Holy Ghost testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me" (Acts 20:23). This section, moreover, provides a close link with the earlier part of the epistle, especially 4:7-12 and 6:4-10, thereby affording further evidence of the unity of II Corinthians. In fact, in 6:4ff. stripes, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watchings, and fastings are listed as things by which Paul was able to commend himself as a minister of God – the very things which he mentions in our present passage in authentication of himself as a minister of Christ. [Hughes 407]



11:25b-27 What is here revealed about Paul's fellowship? (1 Cor.11:19; Matt.13:30)

11:28-33 Note that it is Paul's LOVE which gets him in these dangerous situations: 1. love of the brethren (vv.28,29) 2. love of

Are you going to be happy in heaven?

[12:3] Are you quite sure you would be happy in heaven? I know people who cannot enjoy an hour at a prayer-meeting who imagine they would enjoy eternity in heaven. If you have not a new nature ... so that you can enjoy Him now and delight in fellowship with His people, how do you expect to enjoy God and fellowship with the saints in heaven? I am afraid that if some of you were suddenly caught up into heaven without any inward change, you would hardly be there before you would be seeking to get out of that holy place because you have not a nature that is in touch with heaven. [Ironsides 258,259]

[11:26,27] One is moved to wonder how much we who are Christ's ministers in our contemporary western civilization really know of these things – labours, persecutions, perils, watchings, want, cold, and nakedness – which the Apostle here sets forth as authenticating marks of his ministry. Is not the conclusion inescapable that less self-concern and less love of present security would mean greater apostolicity? But how many are there today who, with Paul, can say: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17)? [Hughes 414]

Jesus (Acts 9:15-30 -- esp.vv.15,20,22,28)

[11:33] If ever Paul felt tempted to think too highly of himself, the memory of this inglorious escape was calculated to keep him humble; he records it here as compensation for his having boasted 'as a fool'. [Bruce 245]

Study 28b: BOAST NOT in POWER, but WEAKNESS (12:1-13)

12:1-4 Contrast Paul's reticence in regard to supernatural experiences with modern 'apostles'!

[12:4] How often people have wanted to tell me about their visions! I am always suspicious. I want to know what they had for supper the night before! If people have visions of this sort they are silent about them. Fourteen years had passed, and Paul had never told about them; and even now he could not tell. They were inexplicable, unspeakable words, words not lawful for a man to utter. [Morgan 267]



Harry Ironside

[12:2] I have an idea, knowing myself as well as I do, that if I had been in the third heaven yesterday, I should be telling you about it this morning. I would forget everything else and tell you what a wonderful time I had in the third heaven, and then if you believed me, you would look at me and say, "What a saint he must be that God should want his company ...!" ... he did not want people to think of him. He did not mind speaking of the time when he was ignominiously let down over a wall in a basket. That was something that people would sneer at, laugh at ... [Ironside 255]

12:5-7 The 'surpassing greatness of the revelations' has not resulted in pride in Paul. Why?

[12:7] The peril of any high spiritual experience is that of braggadocio, that of the uplifted chin. I have known people who have gone to Keswick and have received great blessing; but the trouble was that they came home and strutted round among their fellow members of their church with damnable pride. Paul saw the purpose of the affliction. "That I should not be exalted above measure." ... There is nothing more hindering the work of God than the uplifted and proud Christian. "That I might not be exalted above measure." He has come to thank God that He denied his request. He has come to find out that that denial was a denial of love. [Morgan 268]

[12:7] Here we arrive at the true purpose behind Paul's disclosure of his rapture to the third heaven: it was in order that, while glorying in weaknesses, he might expose and explain his greatest disability of all ... Is there a single servant of Christ who cannot point to some "thorn in the flesh", visible or private, physical or psychological, from which he has prayed to be released, but which has been given him by God to keep him humble, and therefore, fruitful, in His service? And is not this the case to a special degree with those who have been called to be ministers of the gospel? Every believer must learn that human weakness and divine grace go hand in hand together. Hence Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is, by its very lack of definition, a type of every Christian's "thorn in the flesh" ... [Hughes 441-443]

Speaking of
visions ... and
baskets!

12:8-10 What is there here which gives the final answer to those who equate prosperity with blessing, and unanswered prayer with sin (and thus with the curse of God)?

His prayer was indeed answered, not by his deliverance from the affliction, but by his receiving the necessary grace to bear it. [Bruce 249]

[12:8,9] This is the summit of the epistle, the lofty peak from which the whole is viewed in true proportion. From this vantage-point the entire range of Paul's apostleship is seen in focus – his calling, his conversion, his weaknesses, his trials, and his labours, his conquests and his exaltations – all fall into place; and as the splendour of the sun lights up and transfigures the dark ravines of a great mountain, so the grace of God transfuses and triumphs over, and even through what is least impressive in the Apostle's constitution. All is of grace (I Cor. 15:10) ... [Hughes 451]

[12:10] "... how great is the advantage of affliction; for now indeed that we are in the enjoyment of peace we have become supine and lax, and have filled the Church with countless evils; but when we were persecuted we were more soberminded and more earnest and more ready for church attendance and for hearing" [Chrysostom, end of 4th cent, in Hughes 454]

"How great is the
advantage of
affliction"

12:11-13 The 'signs of an apostle' were not the only proofs of Paul's authority. In his own mind, what was the pre-eminent mark of the genuineness of his apostleship? (11:7-12)

[12:13] The contrast between Saul of Tarsus and Paul the Apostle could not have been more striking, nor the contrast between his manner of approach to Damascus and his manner of exit from it ... The man who experienced the ineffable "ascent" even to the third heaven was the same man who had experienced the undistinguished "descent" from a window in the Damascus wall. Paul is determined to keep himself in true perspective, which is that of a weak and unworthy mortal who owes everything to the grace of Almighty God. Hence the relation of his rapture into the third heaven is hemmed in, as it were, on the one side by the narration of his inglorious escape in weakness from Damascus and, on the other, by the reference to the humiliating "thorn in the flesh" which he was called upon to endure (12:7ff.). [Hughes 422]

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