

1 Corinthians 4:7: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou, that thou didn't not receive? Now if thou didn't receive it, (from God) why dost thou glory (or boast) as if you did not receive it from God?"

It is not in our fallen and sinful nature to glorify God, but rather to glory and take pride in ourselves! Pride was one of the temptations presented to Eve in the Garden of Eden:

"For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Pride doesn't ONLY affect the lost, it is equally dangerous in the Christian's life. It follows us like that little dust cloud followed Linus on Charlie Brown, do you remember that? None of us will be freed from doing battle with pride until this body of sin is laid in the grave.

If you tell me that you're not proud... you just did!
If you tell me from a broken spirit that you know you suffer from pride and that you hate your pride, you're on the path to godly humility.

We know what pride looks like in the lost, but what does it look like in the saved? A Christian who has fallen into the sin of pride will glory in themselves rather than in God. In their minds, they will quietly resist God and rebel against Him while they are shaking their head YES to his Word.

And then, they become will become puffed up because of their knowledge, gifts, and abilities, all of which, were given to them by God! They will love the praise of men more than the praise of God!

If anyone could have boasted in pride as a Christian, it was Paul, especially after what happened to him in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6.

Beloved, Paul had learned Christ in such a way that he was often able to effectively mortify pride out of his life. Paul was battle-hardened as a spiritual soldier, highly experienced in grappling against himself. Our text tells us that Paul was "caught up to the third heaven, into paradise"; think about what that would do to you in your mind? God would not have so honored Paul if he was proud!

Proverbs 18:12: "Before destruction, the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility."

What is "the third heaven" and "paradise"? I think they're one and the same; it's heaven, the abode of God and of Christ; it is that BLESSED PLACE that our dying Lord promised to bring the dying penitent thief:

"Verily I say unto thee, today, shalt thou be with me in paradise".

In Revelation 2:7, after the Lord Jesus rebuked the church @ Ephesus, He said: "To him that overcometh

will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

When we look up into the beautiful blue skies or at the nighttime stars, we are looking at "the earthly heavens"; Paul was transported above the earthly heavens and "into heaven itself"!

Do you think this might make you feel like a super saint? Do you think there might be a dangerous temptation within your mind to exalt yourself... because God exalted and transported you into heaven, revealed extraordinary things to you, and then, brought you back to the earth, set you back in the world to finish your course?

Paul didn't become proud because God wouldn't allow him to... what was God's method or safeguard? He allowed Satan to afflict him, and so he weakened Paul. More to come on that.....

But back to Paul's experience, He could not tell whether he was caught up or transported in body and soul, or just that his soul was transported into the third heaven or paradise. Bottom line: He didn't know!

WHAT WE DO KNOW is that he heard "unspeakable (or inexpressible) words". Heavenly words NOT lawful for a man to utter or repeat down here in the earth and in the world. That either means he was forbidden by God to repeat them, or he was not able to articulate what he heard, I cannot speculate any further. The transfiguration! Peter, James, John!

The Apostle John saw visions of heaven, which he was allowed to write about: Revelation 19:11-13

2 Corinthians 12:5: "Of such an one (or of this man) will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities"

Paul spoke of this experience in the 3rd person; I believe, TO DEFLECT the glory away from himself and to Christ! But what Paul did glory in was THIS MAN WHO WAS "IN CHRIST", and THIS MAN who was caught up into heaven. I WILL GLORY "in such an one"!

It is as if he disconnected himself from THIS MAN who was in Christ! But I will not glory IN MYSELF or in what is outward, earthly, and fleshly.

2 Corinthians 12:6: "For though I would desire to glory, (outwardly and in the flesh), I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, (or I refrain from doing so), lest any man should think of me ABOVE that which he seeth me to be, or that which he heareth of me."

If there's anything Paul greatly feared in his Christian life, it was pride, that he might exalt himself because of "the abundance of these revelations" from God. Here's where this becomes very practical for you and me.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

God allowed Satan to afflict Paul to keep him from exalting himself!

All my infirmities and afflictions that came into my life were ordained by my God and heavenly Father for my good and sanctification...to prevent me from being arrogant and conceited. BECAUSE of the abundance of the visions and revelations from God...

"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, God allowed this affliction, (and then Paul repeated WHY God allowed it), lest I should be exalted above measure."

God afflicted and weakened me, and He kept me in THIS WAY to prevent me from being proud and arrogant! To prevent me from being puffed up and thinking that I was something!

Learn here that Satan is more than willing to oblige and to afflict God's people when God moves the hedge and permits him to do so. And while Satan doesn't intend anything but evil against you, God will use Satan's afflictions and his evil intentions against you to strengthen/sanctify you!

What did this affliction drive Paul to do? Pray! 2 Corinthians 12:8

I believe this is one of the great difficulties in our Christian lives... When trials and afflictions come to us, they should have a sanctifying influence in our lives... but we don't know how to "glory in our infirmities", and because we don't, the power of Christ does not rest upon us.

Paul received something BETTER when he prayed and asked God to take away his thorn in the flesh, and this is what we so desperately need to learn as children of God.

God gifted him with a continuing of the affliction, (God lovingly denied Paul's request to remove it), but THEN, God gave Him what he didn't ask for... grace to endure it.

A sufficient and continual supply of grace to endure it! Call it God's safeguard against pride! God gifted Paul with a weakness so that he might be strong!

Again, this is very difficult for us to learn, and that is because we naturally don't like to be weakened and afflicted. Beloved, UNTIL WE REALIZE and BELIEVE that the sufferings and afflictions that weaken us, are "ACTUALLY DESIGNED" by God to strengthen and sanctify us, WE WILL NOT GROW as Christians!

My grace is sufficient for thee: for MY strength is made perfect in YOUR weakness!

I have personally heard lost men and women speak about their afflictions with bitterness and anger against God.

Child of God, your troubles, afflictions, and sufferings are working for you, they are designed by God to sanctify you and to drive sin and pride out of your life, and to complete dependence upon God.

I hope this helps you to understand HOW Paul could say: "I will glory in mine infirmities".

What Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:9B-10 is the language of a Christian who is "aloft" and seated with Christ in heavenly places in Christ!

2 Corinthians 7:4, 13:3-4, Romans 5:3-5

If you're lost, not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, but you've heard the gospel of Christ... you're resisting the goodness of God.

Whether you want to believe it or no, you won't come because refuse to come. Proverbs 16:18