

Dr. J. Ayodeji Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 13, 2 Corinthians 12 – Foolish Boasting and Heavenly Visions

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 13, 2 Corinthians 12 – Foolish Boasting and Heavenly Visions, Biblicalelearning.org

Dr. Adewuya's session 13 on 2 Corinthians chapter 12 focuses on Paul's response to false teachers in Corinth who boasted of spiritual experiences. To counter their influence, Paul reluctantly engages in "foolish boasting," recounting his own heavenly vision while contrasting it with his earthly weaknesses, symbolized by his "thorn in the flesh." Adewuya explains that Paul's intent is not self-promotion but to highlight that true apostolic power resides in God's grace demonstrated through human frailty. The session further examines Paul's defense of his ministry and his deep concern for the Corinthians' spiritual well-being, emphasizing his selfless service and warning against their unrepentant behavior before his impending third visit. Ultimately, the teaching underscores that authentic ministry is validated by faithful service and love for others, not by extraordinary personal experiences.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 13 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Pauline Epistles → 2 Corinthians).



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on 13.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 13, 2 Corinthians 12 – Foolish Boasting and Heavenly Visions

Briefing Document: Dr. Ayo Adewuya on 2 Corinthians 12 - Foolish Boasting and Heavenly Visions

Subject: Analysis of 2 Corinthians 12, focusing on Paul's "foolish boasting," his account of heavenly visions, and the significance of his "thorn in the flesh" in the context of his apostolic authority and the challenges posed by false teachers in Corinth.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

This session by Dr. Adewuya delves into 2 Corinthians chapter 12, which continues Paul's "foolish boasting" initiated in chapter 11. The central themes revolve around:

- **The Necessity and Nature of Paul's Boasting:** Paul's boasting is presented as a reluctant response to the boasting of false teachers in Corinth who were likely emphasizing their own spiritual experiences. Adewuya highlights that Paul felt "compelled by the situation to boast involuntarily" (p. 1). He emphasizes that Paul acknowledges boasting is "not profitable" (p. 1), but necessary to counter the influence of the intruders.
- **Heavenly Visions and Revelations:** Paul shifts from his sufferings to an account of a profound heavenly experience. Adewuya discusses the exegetical question of whether the "visions and revelations of the Lord" (p. 3) are *from* the Lord (subjective genitive) or *about* the Lord (objective genitive), suggesting Paul might have intended both. He emphasizes that the focus should be on the revelation itself, which surpassed the claims of his opponents.
- **Paul's Retice and the Purpose of His Account:** Adewuya stresses Paul's hesitancy in recounting his "ecstatic experience" (p. 4). He notes that Paul describes the experience in the third person ("I know a man in Christ") in verses 1-6, creating an "opaque description" (p. 2), contrasting with the first-person account of his weakness and God's grace in verses 7-10. This reticence serves to avoid self-commendation and highlights that validation of ministry does not come from such experiences. As Adewuya states, "It is irrelevant as a validation for his ministry" (p. 4).

- **The Significance of the "Thorn in the Flesh":** Following the account of his heavenly vision, Paul introduces his "thorn in the flesh," a persistent weakness despite his extraordinary experience. Adewuya clarifies that the purpose of this thorn was "so that I will not boast" (p. 7) and to keep him humble. He emphasizes that God's answer to Paul's prayer for its removal was not a yes, but the assurance: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (implied from p. 7).
- **Lessons from the "Thorn":** Adewuya derives several crucial lessons from Paul's thorn: 1) God allows thorns, 2) A thorn is not a punishment for past or present sins, 3) God has a purpose in thorns, and 4) God has power over thorns. He concludes, "God chose to demonstrate his power, not by removing the thorn, but by doing something greater, by giving grace that was sufficient to bear it" (p. 9).
- **Commendation, Trust, and Paul's Apostolic Motives:** Paul then addresses the Corinthians directly, noting that they should have commended him. He defends his actions and reiterates his selfless motives, emphasizing that he did not want to be a financial burden. He states, "For I do not seek what is yours, but you" (p. 9). He expresses concern about their spiritual state upon his potential third visit, fearing "strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances" (p. 10).
- **Paul's Focus on Edification:** Throughout his defense, Paul insists that his actions, even his "foolish boasting," are ultimately for the "upbuilding" (p. 10) and "edification" (p. 11) of the Corinthian church. He aims to correct the distorted image created by his opponents so that their confidence in his apostleship can be restored, rescuing them from "certain ruin" (p. 11).

Key Quotes:

- "Compelled by the situation to boast involuntarily, which you see in verse 1 of chapter 12, boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable." (p. 1)
- "God's grace was what made Paul's hardship and constant suffering bearable." (p. 1)
- "The thrust of the accounts, as Paul tells them, is that Paul's strength as an apostle comes through the admission of his own weakness for the sake of the power of Christ in his life." (p. 2)
- "It is to unmask the boast of his opponents before the Corinthians." (p. 2) - Regarding Paul's rhetorical intent.

- "The reticence or the hesitancy with which Paul speaks of his extraordinary religious experience is instructive for us. He deliberately discounts it as an argument and describes any such use of it as boasting. It is irrelevant as a validation for his ministry." (p. 4)
- "The yardstick of all ecstatic experiences and emotional demonstrations is whether they proclaim Jesus as Lord, or in other words, whether they build up the church." (p. 5)
- "Paul, unlike many preachers in the 21st century, knows that validation as God's minister does not come from one's self-commendation, endorsement, or from otherworldly and ecstatic experiences. He wants people to evaluate him according to the observable facts of his life and ministry, his obedience and faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel..." (p. 6-7)
- "Paul says I was given a thorn in the flesh so that I will not boast." (p. 7)
- "My grace is sufficient for you." (implied quote from God to Paul, p. 7)
- "God chose to demonstrate his power, not by removing the thorn, but by doing something greater, by giving grace that was sufficient to bear it." (p. 9)
- "For I do not seek what is yours, but you." (p. 9)
- "Actually, it's in the sight of God that we've been speaking in Christ and all for your upbuilding, beloved." (p. 10)

Conclusion:

Dr. Adewuya's analysis of 2 Corinthians 12 highlights the complex situation Paul faced in Corinth. His "foolish boasting," including the account of his heavenly vision, is not driven by pride but by the necessity to counter the claims of false teachers. Crucially, Paul subordinates these extraordinary experiences to the reality of his ongoing weakness, exemplified by the "thorn in the flesh." This paradox underscores that true apostolic power and Christian living are rooted in God's grace made perfect in human weakness, rather than in self-exaltation or reliance on personal spiritual achievements. Paul's ultimate concern is the spiritual well-being and edification of the Corinthian church, motivating his seemingly contradictory actions of boasting and humility. The passage serves as a potent reminder to believers about the proper perspective on spiritual experiences and the true source of strength in ministry.

4. Study Guide: Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 13, 2 Corinthians 12 – Foolish Boasting and Heavenly Visions

2 Corinthians 12 Study Guide: Foolish Boasting and Heavenly Visions

Key Concepts

- **Foolish Boasting:** Paul's reluctant and strategic boasting in response to the false teachers in Corinth who were promoting their own spiritual experiences.
- **Heavenly Visions and Revelations:** Paul's account of an extraordinary spiritual experience to counter the claims of his opponents, delivered with significant reticence.
- **Thorn in the Flesh:** A persistent affliction Paul endured, the nature of which is not explicitly revealed, but served to keep him humble and demonstrate God's power through his weakness.
- **Apostolic Authority:** Paul's defense of his apostleship against the challenges of the false teachers, emphasizing his suffering, service, and the signs and wonders he performed.
- **God's Grace and Power in Weakness:** A central theme where Paul highlights that God's grace is sufficient to sustain him through his trials, and God's power is made perfect in human weakness.
- **Rhetorical Intent:** Paul's strategic use of language and narrative to expose the false teachers, persuade the Corinthians, and reaffirm his apostolic authority.
- **Edification of the Church:** Paul's ultimate goal in his ministry and writings, focusing on the spiritual growth and well-being of the Corinthian believers.

Quiz

1. Why does Paul engage in "foolish boasting" in 2 Corinthians 12?
2. Describe the two phases of Paul's boasting in this chapter and what distinguishes them.
3. What is the significance of Paul's third-person account of his heavenly experience?
4. According to Adewuya, what are some possible interpretations of the "genitive of the Lord" in verse 1?

5. What does Paul emphasize about the irrelevance of ecstatic experiences as validation for ministry?
6. What are the three sequential elements Paul uses to describe his ascent to the third heaven?
7. What does Paul reveal about his "thorn in the flesh," even though its exact nature remains unknown?
8. What are the purposes of the "thorn in the flesh" according to Paul's experience?
9. How does Paul respond to the potential accusation that he was cunningly taking advantage of the Corinthians financially?
10. What are Paul's fears regarding his upcoming third visit to Corinth, and why does he express them?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Paul engages in "foolish boasting" reluctantly and strategically to counter the false teachers in Corinth who were boasting of their own spiritual experiences and undermining his authority. He feels compelled to do so by the situation to demonstrate that he is not inferior to them in terms of spiritual encounters.
2. The first phase (verses 1-6) describes a heavenly experience in the third person, using opaque language and focusing on an unnamed "man in Christ." The second phase (verses 7-10) shifts to the first person, speaking openly about his "thorn in the flesh" and God's response, quoting Christ directly.
3. Paul's use of the third person to describe his heavenly experience may reflect a cultural or rhetorical practice of avoiding self-praise. It also creates a distance, allowing him to speak of the experience without directly boasting about himself, while still making the point that he has had such encounters.
4. Adewuya explains that the "genitive of the Lord" could be subjective, indicating the source of the revelations as coming from the Lord, or objective, designating the content of the visions and revelations as being about the Lord. He suggests Paul may have intended both meanings.
5. Paul emphasizes that while he does not belittle religious experiences, they should not be the primary validation for ministry. He argues that true validation comes from observable facts of one's life and ministry, such as obedience, faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel, and building up the church.

6. Paul describes his ascent to the third heaven in the following order: the person involved is "a man in Christ," the time it occurred was "14 years ago," and the destination was being "caught up into the third heaven" (with ambiguity about being in the body or out of the body).
7. While Paul does not reveal the specific nature of his "thorn in the flesh," he emphasizes that God allowed it, it was not a punishment for sin, God had a purpose for it (to keep him humble and allow God's power to work through him), and God had the power to remove it but chose not to.
8. According to Paul's experience, the purposes of the "thorn in the flesh" were to prevent him from being exalted above measure (to keep him humble) and to keep him in a state of weakness where God's power could be perfected and manifested effectively through him.
9. Paul refutes the potential accusation of financial deceit by reminding the Corinthians that he did not burden them financially and that his associates, whom he sent to them, also conducted themselves with the same spirit and integrity, not taking any advantage of them.
10. Paul fears that upon his third visit, he will find the Corinthians still engaged in strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances. He also fears he will have to mourn over those who have continued in unrepentant sin, indicating his deep concern for their spiritual state.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze Paul's rhetorical strategy in 2 Corinthians 12. How does he balance the need to boast with his desire to avoid self-promotion, and what is the intended impact on the Corinthian audience?
2. Discuss the significance of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" in the context of his argument about God's power being made perfect in weakness. How does this personal struggle contribute to his understanding and teaching about Christian life and ministry?
3. Compare and contrast Paul's attitude towards spiritual experiences with that of the false teachers in Corinth, as portrayed in 2 Corinthians 12. What principles does Paul establish for evaluating the validity and relevance of such experiences?
4. Examine the connection between Paul's refusal to be a financial burden to the Corinthians and his broader motivations for ministry, as revealed in the latter part of 2 Corinthians 12. How does his financial policy reflect his love and concern for them?
5. Based on 2 Corinthians 12, what can we learn about the nature of true apostolic authority and leadership? How does Paul's self-presentation challenge or affirm common notions of spiritual authority?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Boasting (καυχάομαι - kauchaomai):** To glory, boast, or exult, often with a sense of confidence or pride. In this context, Paul engages in "foolish boasting" reluctantly to counter the false teachers.
- **Visions (ὄπτασία - optasia):** A supernatural appearance or sight, often conveying a divine message or revelation. Paul recounts a past vision to establish his spiritual credentials.
- **Revelations (ἀποκάλυψις - apokalypsis):** An unveiling, disclosure, or revelation of something previously hidden, often referring to divine truths or experiences. Paul speaks of "visions and revelations of the Lord."
- **Third Heaven:** A Jewish concept referring to the highest heaven, the dwelling place of God. Paul describes being caught up to this realm.
- **Paradise (παράδεισος - paradeisos):** Originally a Persian word for an enclosed garden, in Jewish and Christian thought it refers to a place of blessedness, often associated with the presence of God. Paul equates the third heaven with paradise.
- **Thorn in the Flesh (σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί - skolops tē sarki):** A figurative term for a persistent and painful affliction or difficulty. The exact nature of Paul's thorn is debated.
- **Messenger of Satan (ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ - angelos Satana):** An agent or instrument of Satan used to afflict Paul with the "thorn in the flesh."
- **Grace (χάρις - charis):** God's unmerited favor, love, and power freely given to humanity. Paul emphasizes the sufficiency of God's grace in his weakness.
- **Apostle (ἀπόστολος - apostolos):** One sent on a mission or with authority. Paul defends his apostolic authority against those who question it.
- **Edification (οἰκοδομή - oikodomē):** The act of building up, strengthening, or encouraging, particularly in a spiritual sense. Paul states that everything he does is for the Corinthians' edification.

5. FAQs on Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 13, 2 Corinthians 12 – Foolish Boasting and Heavenly Visions, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on 2 Corinthians 12

1. Why does Paul engage in "foolish boasting" in 2 Corinthians 12, especially after stating it's not profitable?

Paul feels compelled to boast due to the boasting of false teachers in Corinth who were emphasizing their own spiritual experiences to undermine his authority. The Corinthians seemed impressed by these claims, leading them to question Paul's standing. While Paul acknowledges that boasting is generally not profitable, he sees it as a necessary tactic to counter the influence of these rivals and to remind the Corinthians of his own credentials and experiences, albeit with a different emphasis.

2. What is the significance of Paul's account of a heavenly vision in this context?

Paul recounts his extraordinary experience of being "caught up to the third heaven" or "paradise" fourteen years prior, not to vaunt his spirituality in the same way as his opponents, but rather ironically and with reticence. He mentions this experience in the third person ("I know a man in Christ") to highlight the absurdity of relying on such ecstatic experiences as the sole validation of ministry. By contrasting his genuine, yet understated, experience with the likely exaggerated claims of the false teachers, Paul aims to "unmask the boast of his opponents" before the Corinthians.

3. What are the key differences between Paul's descriptions in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6 and 12:7-10?

In verses 1-6, Paul speaks in the third person about an unnamed individual's heavenly experience, using opaque and hesitant language, even stating he doesn't know if it was "in the body or out of the body." In contrast, verses 7-10 shift to the first person, with Paul openly declaring his "thorn in the flesh" and quoting Christ directly regarding the sufficiency of His grace in Paul's weakness. This shift highlights Paul's rhetorical strategy: the initial third-person account underscores the extraordinary nature of the experience without self-glorification, while the subsequent first-person narrative emphasizes his present struggles and reliance on God's grace as the true source of his apostolic strength.

4. What is the "thorn in the flesh" that Paul mentions, and what was its purpose?

The exact nature of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is unknown, with various speculations including physical ailments, opposition from others, or personal struggles. However, Paul reveals its purpose was twofold: to prevent him from becoming conceited or "exalted above measure" due to the extraordinary revelations he had received, and to keep him in a state of dependence on God, allowing God's power to be perfected in his weakness.

5. How did God respond to Paul's prayers regarding the "thorn in the flesh"? What lesson can be learned from this?

Paul prayed three times for the removal of the thorn, but God did not grant this request. Instead, God's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." The lesson here is that God's answers to prayer may not always align with our desires. Sometimes, God chooses to provide the grace and strength to endure rather than removing the difficulty. This demonstrates that God's power is often most evident in our vulnerability and reliance on Him.

6. What does Paul teach about the role and significance of religious experiences, such as visions and revelations, in validating ministry?

Paul does not discount religious experiences altogether but emphasizes that they are not the primary validation of one's ministry. He deliberately downplays his own extraordinary experience and instead points to the observable facts of his life, his obedience, faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel, and his genuine love and concern for the Corinthians as the true measures of his apostleship. He cautions against ministers who base their authority solely on personal revelations, arguing that the ultimate yardstick is whether these experiences proclaim Jesus as Lord and build up the church.

7. How does Paul demonstrate his love and concern for the Corinthians in this chapter, particularly regarding financial matters?

Despite the Corinthians' wavering support and the false accusations against him, Paul reiterates his deep, paternal love for them. He emphasizes his commitment to not being a financial burden to them, stating he would "most gladly spend and be expended for your souls." He clarifies that he is not seeking their possessions but their well-being, following the example of parents providing for their children. This policy is not just to silence his critics but to demonstrate the purity of his motives and his desire for their spiritual growth.

8. What are Paul's fears and concerns as he anticipates his third visit to Corinth?

Paul expresses his fear that upon his arrival in Corinth, he will find them in a state of spiritual disarray, characterized by strife, jealousy, anger, disputes, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances. He also worries that he might be perceived by them in a negative light. His deepest concern is that he will have to mourn over those who have continued in sin without repentance, indicating his pastoral responsibility and his desire for their genuine transformation.