

II Corinthians

Chapter 11:21 – 12:10

(11:21-33)

²¹ To my **shame** I must say that we have been weak by comparison. But in whatever respect anyone else is bold—I am speaking in foolishness—**I too am bold**.

Shame > (Strong's) dishonor

Wuest > disparagement

Plummer > "They more than tolerate those who trample on them while they criticize as 'weak' one who shows them great consideration"

I too am bold > **Proverbs 26:4-5** > Do not answer a fool according to his foolishness, or you will also be like him. ⁵ Answer a fool as his foolishness deserves, so that he will not be wise in his own eyes.

²² Are they **Hebrews**? So am I.

Are they **Israelites**? So am I.

Are they **descendants of Abraham**? So am I.

Hebrews > (Strong's) Usage > a Hebrew, particularly one who speaks Hebrew (Aramaic).

Lowery > The designation Hebrews may be an ancestral description but in this context (with Israelites) it may also be a linguistic distinction ... Though Paul was born in Tarsus, he was apparently reared in a Semitic-speaking home of Jewish parentage whose orientation was to the homeland of Palestine.

Utley > "Hebrews" idiomatically referred to the ability to speak Aramaic (cf. Acts 6:1), but with the implication of true racial Jews.

Israelites > (Barnes) The only difference is, that the word *Hebrew* signified properly one who was *from beyond*. The name *Israelite* denoted properly one descended from Israel or Jacob, and the difference between them was, that the name Israelite, being a patronymic derived from one of the founders of their nation, was in use among themselves; the name Hebrew was applied by the Canaanite to them as having come from beyond the river, and was the current name among foreign tribes and nations.

Vincent > Compare **Matthew 3:9; John 8:33; Romans 9:7; Romans 11:1; Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 2:16**. The three names are arranged climactically ...

- **Hebrews** pointing to the nationality
- **Israelites** to the special relation to God's covenant
- **Seed of Abraham** to the messianic privilege

Matthew 3:9 > ⁹ and do not assume that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you that God is able, from these stones, to raise up children for Abraham.

John 8:33 > ³³ They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"

Romans 9:7 > ⁷ nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants shall be named."

Romans 11:1 > ¹ I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? Far from it! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Galatians 3:16 > ¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as one would in referring to many, but rather as in referring to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Hebrews 2:16 > ¹⁶ For clearly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham.

Philippians 3:4-4 > ⁴ although I myself could boast as having confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he is confident in the flesh, I have more reason: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

²³ Are they servants of Christ?—I am speaking as if **insane**—I more so;

- in far more labors,
- in far more imprisonments,
- beaten times without number,
- often in danger of death.
- ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.
- ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods,
- once I was stoned,
- three times I was shipwrecked,
- a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea.

Constable > Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians fits into Luke's chronology of his life at Acts 20:2, so everything that Paul described here occurred before Acts 20:2. Paul's life involved many more dangerous experiences than we read about in Acts.

Insane > (Strong's) to be beside oneself, to be deranged

MacArthur > Beginning in verse 23 Paul presented four apostolic credentials that set him apart from the false apostles ...

- his experience of suffering (11:23-27)
- his experience of sympathy (11:28-29)
- his experience of submission, (11:30-33)
- his experience of the supernatural (12:1-6)

But suffering was exactly what Jesus predicted that His apostles would experience.

John 15:20-21 > ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well; if they followed My word, they will follow yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of My name, because they do not know the One who sent Me.

To that general promise to the apostles of suffering, the Lord added a specific one to Paul. Speaking to Ananias, the Lord said of Paul, (**Acts 9:15–16**).

Acts 9:15–16 > ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer in behalf of My name."

I couldn't figure out why Paul used his sufferings as a validation of the credentials. But let's read 12:7-10 which is just after his revelation of the vision he had been given:

II Corinthians 12:7-10 > ⁷ Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, in behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- ²⁶ I have been on frequent journeys,
- in dangers from rivers,

- *dangers from robbers,*
- *dangers from my countrymen,*
- *dangers from the Gentiles,*
- *dangers in the city,*
- *dangers in the wilderness,*
- *dangers at sea,*
- *dangers among false brothers;*

Dangers from rivers > (Robertson) The rivers of Asia Minor are still subject to sudden swellings from floods in the mountains

Dangers from robbers > (Robertson) Cicero and Pompey won fame fighting the Cilician pirates and robbers

- *²⁷ I have been in labor and hardship,*
- *through many sleepless nights,*
- *in hunger and thirst,*
- *often without food,*
- *in cold and exposure.*

²⁸ *Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.* ²⁹ *Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?*

Led into sin > (Strong's) *skandalizo* > to put a snare (in the way), to cause to stumble, to give offense

Wuest Translation > *Apart from the things I just enumerated is this, the pressure, day after day, namely, my anxiety for all the assemblies. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is being made to stumble, and I am not indignant?*

³⁰ *If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.* ³¹ *The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.*

If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to ... > (Wuest) *Since it is a necessity in the nature of the case for me to boast, I will boast of the things that concern ...*

Weakness > (Precept Austin) (*astheneia* from *a* = without + *sthénos* = strength, bodily vigor) means literally *without strength* or *bodily vigor* = *want of strength* = *lacking strength*. Literally the word refers to bodily diseases or ailments. Another meaning is incapacity to do or experience something, an inability to produce results, a state of weakness or limitation

Forever > (Utley) This is literally "unto the ages"

³² *In Damascus the ethnarch under **Aretas** the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³ and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.*

Aretas > (Vincent) Or Hareth, the father-in-law of Herod Antipas. His capital was the rock-city of Petra, the metropolis of Arabia Petraea.

Robertson > How it came to pass that Damascus, ruled by the Romans after B.C. 65, came at this time to be under the rule of Aretas, fourth of the name, King of the Nabatheans (II Macc. 5:8), we do not know. There is an absence of Roman coins in Damascus from A.D. 34 to 62. It is suggested (Plummer) that Caligula, to mark his dislike for Antipas, gave Damascus to Aretas (enemy of Antipas).

(12:1-10)

¹ *Boasting is necessary, though it is not beneficial; but I will go on to **visions and revelations** of the Lord.*

Visions and revelations > (Wiersbe)

- Paul saw the glorified Christ on the very day he was converted (Acts 9:3ff.; 22:6).
- He saw a vision of Ananias coming to minister to him (Acts 9:12),
- He also had a vision from God when he was called to minister to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17ff.).
- During his ministry, he had visions from God to guide him and encourage him.
 - It was by a vision that he was called to Macedonia (Acts 16:9).
 - When the ministry was difficult in Corinth, God encouraged Paul by a vision (Acts 18:9–10).
 - After his arrest in Jerusalem, Paul was again encouraged by a vision from God (Acts 23:11).
 - An angel appeared to him in the midst of the storm and assured him that he and the passengers would be saved (Acts 27:23).

Constable > Furthermore, "visions" are always seen, but "revelations" may either be seen or perceived in other ways.

² ***I know a man** in Christ, **who fourteen years ago**—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was **caught up** to the third heaven.*

I know a man > (Utley) This is a rabbinical way of speaking of oneself.

Who fourteen years ago > (Vincent) Lit., before fourteen years

Utley > This was probably during Paul's unrecorded early ministry in Tarsus, just before Barnabas came to get him to help at Antioch (cf. Acts 11:25-26).

Caught up > (Utley) This same term is used of

1. Philip in **Acts 8:39** > ³⁹ *When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord **snatched** Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing*
2. "The rapture" in **1 Thess. 4:17** > ¹⁷ *Then we who are alive, who remain, will be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*
3. The male child in **Rev. 12:5** > ⁵ *And she gave birth to a Son, a male, who is going to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her Child was **caught up** to God and to His throne.*

Its basic meaning is to seize as a carnivore does its prey. Paul was unexpectedly and quickly moved in body or mind to God's presence (cf. 2 Cor. 12:4).

³ *And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—⁴ was caught up into **Paradise** and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak*

Paradise > (Utley) *paradeisos* > This is a Persian loan word for "a nobleman's walled garden." The Greek word is used in the Septuagint for "the Garden of Eden" (cf. **Gen. 2:8**; 3:1; **Ezek. 28:13**; 31:18). The term is used in **Luke 23:43** ...

Gen. 2:8 > ⁸ *The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed*

Ezek. 28:13a > *You were in Eden, the garden of God;*

Luke 23:43 > ⁴³ *And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

Hughes > "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

⁵ ***In behalf** of such a man I will boast; but **in my own behalf** I will not boast, except regarding my weaknesses. ⁶ For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; **but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.***

In behalf > (Strong's) over, beyond, on behalf of, for the sake of, concerning

So that no one will credit me > (Constable) Such a revelation could have made Paul quite a Christian celebrity had he publicized it. Instead, he preferred to proclaim his sufferings ("weaknesses"), since by these people could see more easily the supernatural working of God through him.

Utley > Paul says, "do not credit me with what I have not shown you, but with what I have done while among you. Look at my record!"

⁷ *Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from **exalting** myself, there was given to me a **thorn in the flesh**, a **messenger** of Satan to **torment** me—to keep me from **exalting** myself*

Exalting > (Strong's) *huperairo* > *huper* > over, beyond, on behalf of and *airo* > to raise, take up, lift

Utley > This same word is used in 2 Thess. 2:4 to describe the prideful boasting of the "Man of Sin" or Antichrist.

Thorn > (Strong's) anything pointed, a stake, thorn

Multiple commentators state that this word is not used anywhere else in the New Testament (although it is found in the Septuagint in the Old Testament)

In the flesh > (Constable) Most commentators interpret it as a physical ailment

Swindoll > **Galatians 4:15** > *if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me*" ... many conclude that Paul suffered from some affliction

Messenger > (Strong's) messenger, angel

Vincent > Messenger is the word commonly rendered angel in the New Testament, though sometimes used of human messengers, as Luke 7:24, Luke 7:27; Luke 9:52; James 2:25; see also on the angels of the churches, Revelation 1:20.

Torment > (Strong's) to strike with the fist

⁸ *Concerning this I pleaded with the Lord **three times** that it might leave me.*

Three times > (Constable) The fact that Paul repeated his petition "three times" shows how intensely he wanted God to remove his affliction—like Jesus in Gethsemane.

Matthew 26: 37-39 > ³⁷ *And He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him, and began to be grieved and distressed.* ³⁸ *Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."*

³⁹ *And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."*

⁹ *And **He has said** to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **power is perfected** in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the **power** of Christ may dwell in me.*

He has said > (Strong's) *lego*

Precept Austin > *lego* is also in the perfect tense which speaks of the finality (and in that sense the absolute authority) of the truth spoken. It's as if these words ring with continual clarity in Paul's heart and mind as an abiding reminder of assurance and comfort to the great apostle.

Wuest > "*He has said to me, and His declaration still stands*".

Vincent > The force of the perfect tense is to be insisted on. It shows that the affliction was still clinging to Paul, and that there was lying in his mind when he wrote, not only the memory of the incident, but the sense of the still abiding power and value of Christ's grace

Power > (Strong's) (miraculous) power, might, strength

Perfected > (Strong's) to bring to an end, complete, fulfill

¹⁰ *Therefore **I delight** in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, in behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

I delight > (Strong's) *eudokeo* > to think well of, to be well-pleased

Precept Austin > (*eudokeo* from *eu = good, well + dokeo = to think*) means literally to think good, and so to be pleased or delighted. The present tense emphasizes that taking pleasure in variegated negative circumstances was Paul's continual mindset.