

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 110

2 Corinthians ~ Part 17

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

As I have emphasized in my previous posts, we are delving into the profound significance of **Sha'ul's Letters to the Corinthians**, a crucial cornerstone of our faith. This significance is not to be taken lightly but deeply understood and appreciated. Your active engagement in grasping the depth of its meaning and impact on our spiritual journey is not just crucial, but it also shows your responsibility to understand the importance of this text in our faith.

We continue to examine the **Defense of Sha'ul's Apostleship**, which covers 2 Corinthians 10:1 to 13:14. In this post, we begin in Chapter 12:1.

Identify one area in your life where you are struggling or facing opposition. Remember **Sha'ul's** perseverance through his trials, and commit to enduring hardships with joy, knowing that **God's** grace is enough to sustain you in every situation. As you reflect on **Sha'ul's** thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12:1-13, consider areas in your life where you feel weak or inadequate. Instead of being discouraged by these weaknesses, pray for **God's** strength to be made perfect in your weakness. Trust that His grace, with its transformative power, is not just sufficient for you, but it can turn your weaknesses into strengths, and His power is made perfect in your weakness.

Revelations Verify

In this passage, **Sha'ul** has declared his program of showing just how stupid boasting is (see previous post 11:16–21). This is why when he says, ***I have to boast***, he adds that ***there is nothing to be gained by it. I know a man***, namely, myself, **Sha'ul**. Out of modesty, he prefers to speak of himself in the third person when discussing his ***visions and revelations***. That he is speaking of himself is clear from vv. 6b–7; so that when he says in v. 5, ***About such a man I will boast; but about myself I will not boast***, it is as if **Sha'ul** were two persons (compare Romans 7:14–25); or, perhaps more accurately, it is that he is now wholly objective about his experience and utterly unattached to it.

12¹ I have to boast. There is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.² I know a man in union with the Messiah who fourteen years ago was snatched up to the third heaven; whether he was in the body or outside the body ! don't know, God knows.³ And I know that such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body ! don't know, God knows—⁴ was snatched into Gan-'Eden and heard things that cannot be put into words, things unlawful for a human being to utter.

The third heaven is not the air (the first heaven) or the sky where the stars are (the second heaven), but the “place” where **God** is a spiritual realm. Other explanations are possible. **Snatched up**. The term is used at only one other place in the New Testament, 1 Th 4:17, where believers are described as being “snatched up to meet the Lord in the air.” **Whether he was in the body or outside the body, ! don't know, God knows**. Some modern occult-oriented religions make much of “out-of-body experiences”; terms such as “astral projection” and “etheric body” are tossed about to impress the gullible. In my judgment, people sometimes have such experiences, but the experiences are rarely from **God**. They may be from Satan, masquerading as an angel of light (11:14). Or they may be a natural phenomenon about which little is known; Kirlian photography, which reportedly can produce pictures of amputated limbs, illustrates what I mean. In several books, some by Christians, people report “after-death experiences” in which they travel great distances outside their body in a few seconds, sometimes through a “tunnel of light” to a “place” corresponding sometimes to Paradise, sometimes to Hell and sometimes to locations on earth, where they may be “met” by Yeshua or someone else. Of course, these people then “return to their bodies,” which may have been dead by clinical standards for many minutes; otherwise, obviously, there would be no report. In most discussions of such experiences and phenomena, Sha'ul's main point is forgotten—these matters are not to be a source of

pride. A person's reputation should be based only on what his words and deeds warrant (v. 6).

⁵ About such a man I will boast; but about myself I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. ⁶ If I did want to boast, I would not be foolish because I would be speaking the truth. But, because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, I refrain so that no one will think more of me than what my words or deeds may warrant.

Weakness For Yeshua's Sake

⁷ Therefore, to keep me from becoming overly proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from the Adversary to pound away at me so that I wouldn't grow conceited. ⁸ Three times I begged the Lord to take this thing away from me; ⁹ but he told me, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is brought to perfection in weakness." Therefore, I am very happy to boast about my weaknesses, in order that the Messiah's power will rest upon me. ¹⁰ Yes, I am well pleased with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties endured on behalf of the Messiah, for it is when I am weak that I am strong.

God does not bring affliction upon us willingly. He finds no pleasure in our pain. God is not the root cause of our problems; He is the solution. The reason for many of our afflictions is our disobedience to the will of God – doing our own thing, living by the desires of the sinful nature. The sinful nature leads us into good ideas that are not God's ideas. One good idea leads to another, and before long we have wandered away from the Lord. He never does this willingly or for enjoyment. "For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (Lamentations 3:33). His Spirit grieves when we wander, and when He afflicts us, sorrow pierces the heart of God. It takes as long to abandon to Christ as it did to abandon from Christ. The silence of God preceded the outpouring of His compassion.

~ Patrick M. Morley

Walking with Christ in the Details of Life

What was ***Sha'ul's thorn in the flesh***? Some think it was a physical incapacity, such as stuttering (2 Cor. 10:10, 11:6), epilepsy (2 Cor. 5:13, Acts 9:4), or weak vision (Acts 9:7, Galatians 4:15); some, the emotional suffering resulting from not winning ***Jews*** to the ***Messiah*** as he would have liked; others, a recurring temptation, such as greed (Romans 7:8); and yet others take the following phrase, ***a messenger from the Adversary***, to mean that his ***thorn*** was a demonic spiritual being especially dispatched by ***HaSatan*** (Mattityahu 4:1) ***to pound away at*** him similar to ***Job's*** attacks. From vv. 8–9a, we learn that the ***messenger from the Adversary***, whatever it was, even if it was a demon, was sent by ***God***—the ***Adversary*** has no independent power; ***God*** is in control of the universe. We also learn that sometimes ***God's*** answer to prayer is not necessarily to grant the request as asked but to change the person asking (2 Cor. 3:18) so that he no longer wants what he wanted before (vv. 9b–10).

Miracles Are Credentials

¹¹ I have behaved like a fool, but you forced me to do it—you who should have been commending me. For I am in no way inferior to the "super-emissaries," even if I am nothing. ¹² The things that prove I am an emissary—signs, wonders, and miracles—were done in your presence, despite what I had to endure. ¹³ Is there any way in which you have been behind any of the other congregations, other than in my not having been a burden to you? For this unfairness, please forgive me!¹

I have behaved like a fool to boast so much. See 2 Cor. 11:16–21. ***Super-emissaries***. See 2 Cor. 11:5, 13. ***The things that prove I am an emissary*** are ***signs, wonders, and miracles*** (see Mark 16:15–20, Yochanan 14:12), made possible by the power (2 Cor 12:9) which the ***Ruach*** provides (Romans 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4–5, 4:19; Ephesians 3:7, 20); because ***the Kingdom of God is not a matter of words but of power***. (1 Cor. 4:20).

In our next post, we will continue to examine **Sha'ul's Second Letter to the Corinthians**.

¹ 2 Corinthians 12:1–13.

