*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 25 - 30

*Second Corinthians Chapters Twelve and Thirteen*

**Monday, May 25 2 Corinthians 12:1-4**

*“Visions and revelations from the Lord”*

 Evidently certain false apostles claimed to have experienced visions and revelations and had presented this fact to the Corinthian church as proof that they were superior to Paul. The idea of visions as one of the primary ways in which God revealed himself and his word to people was prevalent both in Old Testament and New Testament times. Even as Paul prepares to open up his heart and share a very private and very personal experience, he expresses his reluctance. While God often uses our sharing of the experiences we have had with him to inspire others, we must not become spiritual exhibitionists.

 Paul was not sure whether what he saw was the result of his body being transported to another place or whether God had shown him what he did through the processes of the mind. The one thing Paul was sure of was that he had been in the very presence of God. God used many visions to enlarge Paul’s ministry, such as the vision of a man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9), and the vision of encouragement in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10).

*You reveal yourself to us, Lord, to encourage and guide us. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 26 2 Corinthians 12:5-10**

*“I was given a thorn in my flesh”*

 That Paul told of the thorn in his flesh immediately following his account of his vision of God is not accidental, because evidently he felt that the two experiences were related to each other. Paul seemed to believe that the thorn was given to him to keep him from being excessively proud of the visions God had given him. It wasn’t necessary for him to explain what the thorn was because either the Corinthians already knew or he felt it was not essential to the point he was making. Scholars have speculated as to just what the thorn was, but we don’t really know.

 Paul does clearly state that he gave himself to earnest and repeated prayer that the thorn might depart. Instead of removing the thorn God gave reassurance of his grace and reminded Paul that his strength was made perfect in weakness. Paul never came to feel that the thorn in itself was a good thing, believing rather that it was a messenger of Satan. But he did come to that place in his life where he could see how God’s grace could transform what was bad into something good in his life.

*You take the bad things in my life, Lord, and use them to demonstrate your goodness. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 27 2 Corinthians 12:11-13**

*“I gave you proof that I am an apostle”*

 In 12:11, Paul closes his apology for boasting by returning to the point with which he began in 11:1. He has become a fool by boasting in his personal distinctives and private revelations. The tragedy of the situation is that he should not have had to become a fool in this way, since the Corinthians themselves should have commended Paul based on his ministry with them. When Paul says, “even though I am nothing at all,” he is repeating a truth he has stated before, that he is nothing because everything he is and accomplishes are the result of God’s power in his weakness.

 Paul goes on to support the credibility of his apostleship by affirming the proofs or signs of apostleship that accompanied his ministry. God was the one who performed these signs through Paul, thereby accrediting his apostolic ministry. The signs themselves were the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the conversion and spiritual gifting of the believers in Corinth, on outpouring which was accompanied by wonders and miracles. Paul adds a bit of sarcasm, apologizing for not being a financial burden to them.

*It is by the signs of the power of your Spirit, Lord, that we know true ministry. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 25 - 30

*Second Corinthians Chapters Twelve and Thirteen*

**Thursday, May 28 2 Corinthians 12:14-21**

*“I’m afraid I won’t like what I find”*

 As Paul anticipates his third visit, he begins to feel anxiety about what he may find when he arrives. Each of the eight vices he lists in verse 20 has to do with personal relationships. Grounded in their unwillingness to give up their old sins, they represent what will destroy the fellowship of a church. (1) Quarreling: from the Greek word for the goddess of discord, it is strife rising out of factions, each seeking its own power. (2) Jealousy: the twin word for strife, in the Greek it means a zeal only for one’s own side. (3) Anger: the reaction of a short-fused person who blows up at the slightest provocation. (4) Selfishness: the background of the word describes a self-seeking political candidate who got into office by unfair means. (5) Slander: speaking untruths against another. (6) Gossip: whispering hurtful words about another behind their back. (7) Arrogance: to be swelled up or puffed up. (8) Disorderly behavior: often used of political disturbance. The thought of showing up at the church in Corinth and finding this kind of a spirit would make anyone anxious.

*May the ways we relate to each other in our church, Lord, be pleasing to you. Amen.*

**Friday, May 29 2 Corinthians 13:1-6**

*“Examine yourselves”*

 In the same way a parent after a long telephone conversation with a son or daughter who is away at college will close the visit by saying, “Now don’t forget that . . . ,” Paul closed his letter by reminding them of some of the important points he had already made. First, he reminded them of his coming visit. Second, he reminded them that he was endowed with power – not his own, but God’s power working through him. Third, he would not be tolerant toward any who were guilty of sin.

 But we also find in these reminders Paul’s characteristic effort at reconciliation. For him the ministry of reconciliation was more than a message to be preached; it was a style of life. He had no desire to exercise power merely as a show of strength or form. Rather, he makes it clear that he would prefer they examine themselves and handle their own problems. Paul was expressing his confidence in the fact that people can change, and he was urging them to use his impending visit as an impetus to change. He would prefer to come with gentleness rather than sharpness.

*Show us the truth of our sin, Lord, that we may confess and be forgiven. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 30 2 Corinthians 13:7-14**

 *“I close my letter . . .”*

 In verse 11, Paul issues five commands: be joyful, grow to maturity, encourage each other, live in harmony, live in peace. We must be careful not to gloss over these commands, as if they were merely some “closing remarks” thrown in at the end of the letter. The movement of the five admonitions of verse 11a to the benediction in verse 11b, “Then the God of love and peace will be with you,” demonstrates that God’s blessing of the Corinthians is linked to their ongoing obedience.

 Paul’s own greeting in verse 11 is matched by two final greetings in verses 12-13, both of which continue his emphasis on unity within the church by stressing its local and universal dimensions respectively. Paul first calls for a greeting of “one another with a holy kiss,” a practice among believers that signified their mutual acceptance and oneness as a family. Next, Paul extends to the Corinthians a greeting from “all the saints,” thereby emphasizing their oneness with the church at large.

*May your grace, love and fellowship, Lord, be with us all. Amen.*