

Lesson 23: 2 Corinthians 12:8-21

1) Verses 8-9

a) (7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.) 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

b) Last week we examined many theories as to the identity of Paul's thorn in the flesh. Before we proceed into verse 8, I would like to briefly consider one final issue regarding that thorn. Was it from God or from Satan?

i) The answer perhaps is both.

(1) As we mentioned last week, the passive voice ("was given") in verse 7 suggests to many commentators that Paul viewed God as the source of this thorn.

(2) If so, Satan afflicted Paul, but he did so at God's direction so that Paul would reap a spiritual benefit. This is similar to the case of Job, but there are some differences. With Job, Satan first questioned Job's integrity, and there is no indication that such occurred here. Paul may be recalling here an event that happened to his Old Testament namesake.

(3) 1 Samuel 16:14 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

(4) The evil spirit that troubled Saul was "from the Lord," but it was given to Saul for a very different purpose than the thorn was given to Paul. And the evil spirit sent to Saul replaced the spirit of the Lord that had departed.

(5) Whoever sent the messenger of Satan to Paul, Paul knows that Jesus can remove it if he so wills. But Jesus does not so will. Jesus, who could cast demons out with a word, allowed this one to remain.

ii) What is sent to torment Paul is transformed by God into a means of proclaiming Christ's power and grace.

(1) This surprising twist reflects the paradoxical way God defeats Satan.

(2) Satan no doubt thought at first that he had achieved a victory at the cross, but of course, as we now know (and as he now knows), that day marked

his greatest defeat.

- (3)** God permits Satan to strike the apostle, but God turns the stricken Paul into an even greater instrument of his power.
 - (4)** God is an alchemist when it comes to evil -- he can turn it into good!
 - (a)** Genesis 50:19-20 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.
 - (b)** In fact, at the cross, God turned the greatest evil into the greatest good.
 - (5)** A proud, arrogant Paul would have only hindered the gospel's advance. A humiliated, frail Paul, lead as a captive in God's triumph, has accelerated the gospel's progress so that the fragrance of knowing God spreads everywhere (see 2:14).
- iii)** Verse 8: Paul's initial prayer asking the Lord to remove the stake (or perhaps the messenger of Satan, since the verb in that phrase is always used of persons in the NT) indicates that he did not initially appreciate the significance of this affliction nor was it something easily borne.
- (1)** Few are able to value the onset of anything unpleasant or difficult, and they usually grasp its value only in retrospect.
 - (2)** Paul may have thought at first that this stake would stymie the effectiveness of his ministry, so he desperately wanted it removed.
 - (3)** Times come in our lives when we must learn to accept what is inescapable and then listen for what God is saying to us through it. We might find that we are mistaken about what we think is best for us and for God's work.
- iv)** I begged the Lord three times on this to remove it from me.
- (1)** Paul knows that not Satan but God is in control. If Satan had his wish, he would have preferred the apostle Paul to be proud instead of humble.
 - (2)** "Satan's interests would be much better served if Paul were to become insufferably arrogant. Then the cause of Christ would suffer irreparable damage. But this is not the case, for God watches over his servant. He curtails the power of Satan by permitting him to send only a messenger to Paul. God keeps Paul from harmful pride and on the path of humility by

allowing Satan's messenger to afflict him."

(3) Did Paul pray to God the Father or to Jesus, God the Son?

(a) Some argue that Paul in these verses addresses his prayer directly to Jesus. They point to the example of Stephen in Acts 7 as a similar prayer.

(b) See

http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/read/may_a_christian_address_christ_in_praise_or_prayer.

v) The Lord's response was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

(1) This response was far greater and more profound than anything Paul knew to ask from the Lord.

(2) As Bruce puts it, "His prayer was indeed answered, not by his deliverance from the affliction, but by his receiving the necessary grace to bear it."

(3) Paul does not give us the details about how he received this answer from the Lord. Did it come in another vision? "He said to me" is in the perfect tense, which means that the answer he received still stands.

(4) Paul learns that the stake will not hamper his calling. He can make do with the grace he has already received, and the power of Christ will become more visible as it works through his weakness.

(5) The first term in the Greek word order of Jesus' reply is "sufficient."

(a) This word is emphatic because of its primary position, and it also implies the absolute authority of the sovereign Lord: the provisions that he supplies are sufficient for his people.

(b) Paul himself could testify to that truth by telling the church in Philippi, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

(6) Jesus' grace is revealed in his power.

(a) Calvin comments, "God's strength is made perfect only when it shines out clearly enough to win the praise that is its due."

(b) The evidence of Christ's power in Paul's weakness demonstrates that not the false apostles, who boasted of their own prowess, but Paul,

who boasted in the Lord, was the true apostle.

(c) Barclay: It is the glory of the gospel that in our weakness we may find this wondrous grace, for always mans extremity is God's opportunity.

vi) We learn from the message given to Paul that God's grace is not just the unmerited favor that saves us but a force that also sustains us throughout our lives.

(1) The modifier “my” in “my power” is important. Paul is not speaking about power in general, but “the power of Christ” revealed in the crucifixion and resurrection: “For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you” (13:4).

(2) Paul has testified to this power in 1:8-10. In Asia he was utterly, unbearably crushed but he was rescued by God's power which raises the dead.

(3) The cracked clay vessel, buffeted and battered, is held together by the extraordinary power of God (4:7; see 6:7).

(4) When this earthly tent is destroyed, Paul exudes confidence that the power of God will raise him up and give him a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (5:1).

vii) This answer from the Lord helps Paul regard the stake no longer as the work of Satan but instead as something through which the grace of God operates more effectively.

(1) What makes Paul seem so weak to some paradoxically allows the power of Christ to work through him all the more.

(2) “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20)

viii) While Paul is defending himself and his weakness to the Corinthians, what he says does not apply only to himself.

(1) The principle that the power of God rests on the humble can be found throughout the Old Testament.

(a) Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

- (2) Abraham confesses that he is “nothing but dust and ashes” (Gen 18:27).
- (3) Moses asks God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exod 3:11).
- (4) Gideon asks, “How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (Judg 6:15).
- (5) David says, “Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known” (1 Sam 18:23).

ix) In all these cases we see God's basic way of operating in the world:

- (1) But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him (1 Cor 1:27-29).
- (2) This basic principle undermines the whole infrastructure of Corinthian wisdom and boasting and causes the strongholds and high battlements of his competitors' boasting to collapse (10:5).

x) Therefore, all the more gladly I will boast of my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may dwell in me.

- (1) With a concluding remark, Paul responds to and accepts Jesus' word. In the preceding context, he had mentioned the concept weakness a few times. But now the Lord himself uses the word and Paul cheerfully repeats it.
- (2) With this response Paul reveals his inner being, for the one sentence (v. 9a) uttered by Jesus causes the apostle to be joyful in his lot.
 - (a) Complaints, bitterness, and continued pleas are a common reaction to a negative answer, but Paul does not express them.
 - (b) Instead Paul demonstrates gladness, because he is fully aware that divine grace will be more than sufficient for him to cope with his malady. He cheerfully endures his human frailty knowing that Christ functions within him (Gal. 2:20).

(3) Why does Paul boast in his weaknesses?

- (a) The weaker he is, the stronger the power of Christ works through him. Jesus wants to use him as a messenger who comes not in his own

strength but knows his complete dependence on the Lord.

(b) In fact, the wording of the last clause in this verse is unique, for Paul literally says, “that the power of Christ may pitch a tent over me.”

(4) We see indeed a picture of Paul's total submission to Christ.

2) Verse 10

- a) **10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**
- b) Paul scores his point with a memorable aphorism, “when I am weak, then I am powerful,” which is the key for interpreting all that he says in this section.
- i) The point is the same as in 4:7. (“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”)
 - ii) The power working in Paul is most clearly seen as coming from God when “I delight in” means that he accepts the way Christ's power works in his life through his weaknesses.
 - iii) That does not mean that he does not groan under the load of suffering (5:2, 4) and long for the mortal to be swallowed up by life (5:4).
 - iv) But he knows that his suffering follows the precedent of Christ's suffering. It was something that God enables him to endure, not escape. What he endures, he endures for the sake of Christ, and the paradox of the power of God hidden in his apparent weakness parallels Christ's weakness and power demonstrated in the crucifixion.
 - v) “As the power of God was revealed through the weaknesses of the crucified Lord for the salvation of the world, so the life and power of the risen Christ are being revealed through his weak apostles in the midst of humiliations and afflictions.”
 - vi) The false apostles keep the Corinthians from seeing how Christ's power is at work in him and lead them away from the cross of Christ.
 - vii) Paul's goal is not simply to defend himself, but to help them “see things correctly” through the proper spiritual lens.
- c) We might look around us today and see the church as weak.
- i) What can we do when we are seemingly such a small speck in a vast sea of religious confusion? What difference can we make when we are so weak?

"For when I am weak, then I am strong."

- ii) Our apparent weakness is a reminder that the power is not in us but in God. We are not the power of God unto salvation, but the gospel we proclaim is.
 - iii) That gospel has been cast aside by the so-called mega-churches that seem so powerful to the world. It is they, not we, who are weak -- not because they are few in number or low in resources -- but because they are working alone. They do not have God on their side.
 - iv) In one sense, God's people have been in the majority only twice in the history of the world -- in the Garden and after the Flood. But in another sense, God's people have always been in the majority because God dwells with us.
 - v) Hebrews 13:6 The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
- d) Paul concludes with a brief summary of the hardship lists in the letter.
- i) He "delights in" (the word can also mean "is pleased with") his "weaknesses, insults, catastrophes, persecutions, and pressures."
 - ii) The insults likely refers to his rivals' insolent slander against him as one who was weak, debased, and amateurish.
 - iii) "Catastrophes" refer to the "hardships" he has listed in 4:8-9; 6:4-5; 11:27-28.
 - iv) The "persecutions" are listed in 11:24-25a, and the "pressures" or difficulties (tight situations) are listed in 11:25b-26.

3) Verse 11

- a) **11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.**
- b) Paul admits to being a fool by adopting the boastful tactics of his competitors, but by doing so he tars his opponents with the same brush.
 - i) They are fools as well (see 11:19-20), but, unlike Paul, they are not playing the part of a fool. They take their boasting seriously.
 - ii) The Corinthians are also made out to be fools for allowing themselves to be captivated and led astray by foolish boasting. They have dishonored themselves by betraying their apostle and failing to defend him.

- c) Paul uses this failure as his final justification for his fool's speech (see 11:1-6).
 - i) Since they have not defended him against his competitors, he must defend himself. The truth had to be told, more to save the Corinthians from such fools than to save Paul's reputation.
 - ii) They were swept off their feet by these encroachers who pandered to their aspirations. They turned away in shame from their own apostle who seemed too afflicted, too weak, and too tongue-tied.
- d) He repeats his sardonic affirmation from 11:5 with a play on the word "nothing": "[With respect to] nothing was I inferior to these super apostles even if I am nothing."
 - i) We need not read "I am nothing" as a charge leveled against him by the rivals or the Corinthians. It is Paul's honest evaluation of his status before God (see 1 Cor 15:9-10; 2 Cor 3:5; Phil 3:12-16).
 - ii) Paul would insist that his apostleship is second to none, though he is the least of all the apostles, and he certainly does not take a back set to the **flamboyant buffoons** who have overrun the church.
 - iii) But he knows that whatever he is comes from God. If he is nothing, so are the other superlative apostles (see 1 Cor 3:5-9). The difference is that they do not recognize that they are nothing before God and strut around as if they were the **kingpins of the kingdom**.

4) Verse 12

- a) **12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.**
- b) Possibly, "the signs of an apostle" was a slogan brandished about by the rivals, or perhaps it came from the Corinthians. But this need not be an enemy's slogan at all. Paul asserts that certain signs were accomplished that verified that the power of God was at work in a community and that authenticated his ministry as Christ's apostle.
 - i) When it comes to everything that truly commends an apostle as an apostle, Paul has it, from his straightforward speaking, his morally upright behavior, and his perseverance (1:12; 4:2), to signs, wonders and miracles.
- c) Working wonders and miracles does not make one an apostle, however. In the list of gifts in 1 Cor 12:28-30, those who work miracles are distinguished from apostles, whose main task is proclamation.
 - i) Christians must still discern the difference between wonders wrought by God

and false wonders wrought by Satan. Paul cautions the Thessalonians that the coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders (2 Thess 2:9).

- ii) But Paul trusts that the Corinthians can attest that it was the power of God at work in Paul's preaching and presence in Corinth (1 Cor 2:4-5; 2 Cor 6:7).
- iii) Nevertheless, Paul says these "signs, wonders and miracles" were done "with great perseverance" ("all endurance"), which suggests that they were done over a long period and in the context of his hardships and afflictions catalogued earlier.

5) Verse 13

- a) **13 For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.**
- b) Paul continues to press his case with irony. He asks in what respect they were inferior to or worse off than other churches except that he did not weigh them down with financial obligations to him.
- c) They are disadvantaged compared with other churches only in Paul's refusal to take advantage of them.
- d) The "I" in "I was never a burden to you" is an emphatic autos, "I myself." It sets him apart from the opponents who have exploited them (11:20). Surely they do not believe that refusing to sponge off them somehow disqualifies him as an apostle?
 - i) Paul took money from churches much less well off to avoid taking money from the Corinthians. Why? Because the peddlers all took money. Corinth was full of professional teachers who were supported by their students. Paul wanted to be distinctive, and the best way to do that was to not take a dime from the Corinthians. The false apostles knew that was a distinction and so they created a false rumor that Paul was siphoning money from the Jerusalem contribution.
- e) If they count Paul's failure to take money from them a wrong or sin, he mockingly begs their forgiveness (see 11:7). He is no peddler of the gospel and will not be put into a position where he must fawn over his benefactors to repay their support and keep the gifts coming.
- f) He lives out the gospel principle of not seeking his own advantage but that of another (1 Cor 10:17).

6) Verse 14

- a) **14 Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.**
- b) Paul broaches again the touchy subject of the Corinthians' desire to support him while he is ministering among them (see 11:7-11). This leads him to the topic of his impending visit to Corinth, which is solemnly announced by "behold."
- c) In these closing verses of the chapter, Paul offers another explanation for his policy about refusing their support.
 - i) He is their parent and is responsible for them, not vice versa.
 - ii) The image recalls his plea in 6:13, "As a fair exchange -- I speak as to my children -- open wide your hearts also." He has described his relationship to them as the father who cares for them (1 Cor 4:14) and who begot them (1 Cor 4:15).
 - iii) Paul therefore appeals to the widely held expectations regarding the relationship between parents and children.
- d) He is their spiritual parent who has given his children all that they needed from their infancy, providing milk to solid food (1 Cor 3:2). He has not injured them by refusing to accept their support, and he will not allow them to turn the natural parent-child relationship into an unnatural client-patron relationship. They have injured him instead and are guilty of egregious sin by failing in their duty as his children to show him love and honor.

7) Verse 15

- a) **15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.**
- b) Paul continues the theme of being a loving parent (see 11:11) with emphatic expressions: but I will gladly spend everything I have and will be spent for your souls.
- c) Here is the best litmus test for the sign of an apostle. A true apostle of the crucified Christ is one who is willing to spend and be spent on behalf of a congregation. He serves at great cost to himself for the great benefit of others.
- d) The problem is the more he loves them and sacrifices for them, even trying to avoid painful visits, the less they seem to love him in return. The community does not love him when it listens to and tolerates slander and puts him in the awkward position of having to commend himself to them all over again as if he were a

stranger.

8) Verse 16

- a) **16 But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.**
- b) The Corinthians must agree that he has never asked for nor taken any material support from them for himself (1 Cor 9:12,15,18; 2 Cor 11:7,9; 12:13).
- c) But someone apparently has twisted his actions and concocted a conspiracy theory that Paul had hatched some dark plan to deceive them by profiting from the collection for Jerusalem. They accuse him of being crafty and catching them with guile (see 4:2).
- d) To use financial intermediaries to appear unsullied by concern for financial matters was not without precedent in the ancient world. Isocrates mocked the hypocrisy of the sophists who did not trust the virtue of their students and insisted that their fees be paid in advance and deposited with a third party.
- e) Possibly, someone claimed that the collection was all a ruse by which Paul would have associates gather up the money and he would covertly skim a portion off the top without them being any the wiser and without incurring any social debt to them.
- f) It is also possible that no one has accused him of defrauding them at all and that Paul is making a preemptive strike, nipping any such conspiracy theories in the bud before they blossom and sow further seeds of discontent.

9) Verses 17-18

- a) **17 Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? 18 I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?**
- b) If someone has attacked Paul's reputation with rumors and innuendo, he now asks them to give specific evidence. Identify the supposed instances of trickery.
 - i) He phrases the first question, "Did I exploit you?" in such a way in Greek that it expects the answer no! A better translation is, "Titus did not exploit you, did he?"
 - ii) They know firsthand the character of Titus. Their godly repentance and warm reception of Titus on his last visit (7:6-7,13-15) show that they do not harbor suspicions of his integrity.
- c) Some interpreters take this reference as a clue that these chapters are part of a

later letter written after 8:6,18.

- i) It is just as likely, however, that Paul looks back on a previous mission when Titus and a colleague helped in the preparations for the collection.
- ii) In writing this part of the the letter, Paul may not be looking at the event from the time of writing as lying in the future, but from the perspective of the recipient of the letter as something that has already happened.
 - (1) Paul may not be looking back to some earlier mission to Corinth but may be referring to the current mission of Titus and the brother when this letter arrives with them.
- iii) The distrustful cynics can check things out for themselves now. Is Titus taking advantage of them? Is the acclaimed brother from the churches part of some plot to bilk them out of the obligation Paul will owe them as his patron if he takes advantage of their financial support? Would such upstanding men with unblemished reputations be part of some conspiracy to defraud them in any way?

10) Verse 19

- a) **19 Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.**
- b) Paul's words, "Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you?" may be surprising.
 - i) Most readers would think that it is obvious that he has been defending himself.
 - ii) But Paul is not being disingenuous with this question. He wants to make it clear to the Corinthians that he is not the prisoner at the bar having to submit to an embarrassing cross examination.
 - iii) He has committed no offense and need not exonerate himself. Besides that, they are not his judges (1 Cor 4:2-4; 2 Cor 5:10). It is God, not they, he must please. He is therefore speaking before God, not them.
- c) Paul is not defending himself here because that would lend credibility to any charges.
 - i) Defending himself would be the same as commending himself again and would concede that he was in some way responsible for the breach in the relationship.
 - ii) Therefore, he insists that he is not on the defensive, but writing as their

apostle out of concern for them rather than out of a concern to save his reputation. He is not arguing his own case but confronting them with the gospel.

- d) The letter does resemble a trial; accusations have been made and answered.
 - i) We need to understand this trial in a first century context. There was one feature of the Jewish legal process which was totally unlike ours. If a defendant was found to be innocent, the matter might not rest there: an immediate reversal of roles was possible, the former defendant could become the accuser, and charges that had been leveled against him could be used to discredit and condemn his opponents.
 - ii) In our day, the state carries out the prosecution. In the Greco-Roman world the prosecution was brought by private parties (see Luke 23:2; Acts 24:1-8).
 - iii) Paul has in mind "the reversal of roles" which becomes clear in 13:1 when he will be bringing charges against them. Paul is not defending himself; he is prosecuting his opponents and the Corinthians.

11) Verse 20

- a) **20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:**
- b) Paul expresses his fear earlier that they have already been deceived as Eve was by the serpent (11:3).
 - i) Now he expresses his fear that when he comes the Corinthians will be riven with disputes and ravaged by immorality.
- c) The first four sins in this list of vices, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, self-seeking (factions, party spirit), appear in the same order in the list of the works of the flesh in Gal 5:20.
 - i) These sins are the "fruit of paganism."
- d) The next four vices in the list seem specific to the more recent problems at Corinth: slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.
 - i) Slanders and gossiping directly relate to the recent situation with all the backbiting and insinuations. Paul has been the victim of a politically motivated smear campaign by arrogant rivals.
 - ii) Arrogance is a continuing problem at Corinth. Paul uses the verb "to puff up," "to be arrogant," only in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 4:6,18-19; 5:2;

8:1; 13:4).

iii) The mix of all these vices created a disordered church that was bound to split into several unholy fragments unless they were checked.

e) Anyone reading these letters is left with a big unasked question: where were the leaders of this church? They may have been caught up in the rampant immorality of which Paul speaks, they may have been or been taken in by the false apostles, or (most likely) they were simply unable and inadequate to handle the situation in Corinth. These so-called leaders may have been the reason that Paul has so much to say about the qualifications of elders in his other letters.

12) Verse 21

a) **21 And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.**

b) If the congregation's life is marked by disharmony and immorality, it will be humiliating to Paul.

c) Paul believes that the proof that Christ is speaking in him -- something the Corinthians are so interested in (13:3) -- derives from the founding of the congregation and its faithfulness to the gospel, not from such peripheral things as revelatory visions or magisterial bearing.

i) If the congregation's life is still plagued by impurity, immorality, and licentiousness (12:21), he fears that God will rule that he has run in vain, and he will be chastened before God, who tests each one's work by fire (see 1 Cor 3:10-15). That is something far more serious than any humiliation caused by any one of them. Their disobedience to God's will is as humbling to him as his stake in the flesh.

d) While he is afraid that he will not find them as he might want, he also concedes that they will not find him as they might want.

i) They have already expressed their disdain of his humbleness when face to face with them (10:1). But it will be a different kind of humiliation. It will not come from being demeaned and abased according to the world's standards but from being spiritually humbled before God for their moral disgrace.

ii) Most fear being judged by other humans; Paul feared God more.

iii) Most are only willing to take responsibility for their own conduct and, even then, will try to pin any blame on someone or something else. Paul accepted responsibility before God for the Corinthians' conduct. No wonder he spent

many a sleepless night burdened by anxiety over his churches (11:28).

- e) Paul adds to the list of sins that he fears that the "many" may be guilty of continuing to do: indulge in impurity, immorality, and licentiousness.
 - i) These same sins open the list works of the flesh in Gal 5:19 in a slightly different order and were rampant in the bankrupt moral climate of the Gentile world.
 - ii) We should not suppose that Paul believes that passions are running riot in Corinth, but this morally lax seaport city provided ample opportunities to gratify sexual sins. Paul's fear is that an embarrassing number of Corinthian Christians have not been fully reformed from their past sexual conduct to bring it in line with the new creation in Christ, "washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God" (I Cor 6:9-11).
 - iii) Paul knew that for the Corinthians to have power in weakness, they could not blend in with the world around them. They had to be just as distinctive from the world around them as Paul was from the false apostles that surrounded him.
- f) In the context of Chapters 10-11 Paul may imply that such a moral collapse could be expected after the Corinthians have been flirting with false apostles, the deputies of Satan, who peddle a false gospel.
 - i) He wants them to get rid of the vices and get rid of the agitators.
 - ii) Paul replicates the kind of frank criticism that might have been in the severe letter.
- g) Some think this ringing denunciation against their vices to be a strange finale to a letter that earlier had praised them for their godly repentance (7:9-11), and therefore it would seem to make more sense if it belonged to a separate letter.
 - i) But the Corinthians would have taken this admonishment quite differently in their context.
 - ii) One commentator asks, "What would the Corinthians think of one who could thus blow hot and cold in successive breaths?"
 - iii) Danker cites Plutarch to help explain how the Corinthians might have understood this combination of warm affirmation and stern warning: "When blame is mingled with praise, and is expressed with complete frankness, yet devoid of disdain, and induces repentance rather than ire, it appears well-disposed and remedial."

- iv)** This frank criticism is fitting for Paul's role as their apostle and guardian who must preserve their purity for Christ (11:2). Paul still has qualms about whether they have completely submitted to Christ and writes again in this reproachful vein to insure their obedience. His goal is to build them up in Christ.