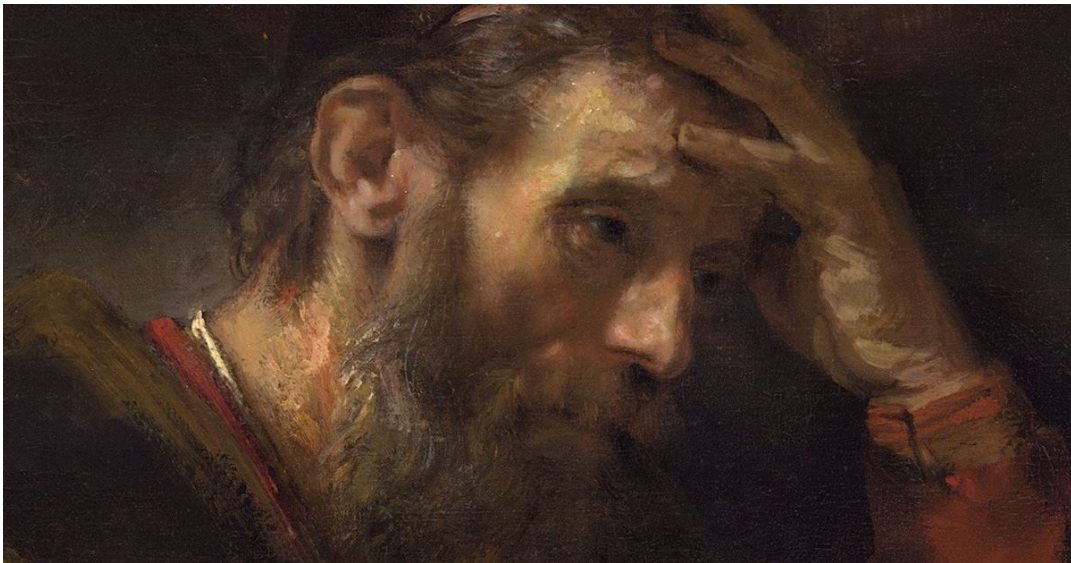


2 Corinthians 12-13

Paul Gets a Little Defensive, part 2

The Big Idea

In the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians Paul walks a delicate line between servile humility and defensive boldness. In these chapters we learn more of Paul's biography than any of his other writings. We will see that his call to ministry was not without interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict. Paul continues the theme of pointing us toward the Lord rather than evaluating Paul at a human level.



Have you ever had a spiritual “mountain top experience”? Did you have any “withdrawal” symptoms when it came to an end? How does the memory of that experience live on for you?

In the two previous chapters (10 and 11) Paul uses a bitter invective against his opponents. Some are comparing Paul to other “super-apostles” and find Paul is lacking in credentials and skills. Paul counters their argument by pulling the rug out from beneath their assumptions. They think success is the sign of God's blessing and power; Paul argues that it's his failures and suffering that prove his worthiness because in his weakness God makes Paul strong. That theme emerges from the Gospel message itself of a crucified and risen Messiah. Paul continues that theme in chapters 12-13, then turns to his final warnings and counsel to the Corinthian church as he closes the book.

12:1-10 Paul's personal struggles in faith

The previous chapter ends with a catalog of sufferings Paul has endured in ministry—he now turns to the place of suffering in his spiritual walk.

vv. 1-7a Paul's ecstatic "mountain top" experience—remember the Corinthians have a "thing" for ecstatic experiences, especially speaking in tongues. Paul begins coyly, then openly, describing his own experience. Why do you think Paul is being coy about this—"I know someone who...."?

vv. 7b-10 Paul's thorn in the flesh—what place does personal suffering play in Paul's life? What do you think the thorn in the flesh might be? Why does suffering take precedence over his ecstatic experience?

How do these verses frame (or reframe) your experience of suffering? Have you ever found strength in weakness? Do you know of others who fit that description?

12:11-21 Two Ships Passing in the Night

Paul and the Corinthians seem to be "missing" one another—what are some of the miscommunications and misunderstandings that have happened?

How might God humble Paul if he finds the church in disorder when he visits?

13:1-10 Final Warnings

How does Paul see the paradox of weakness and strength playing out in his pastoral role within the Corinthian church? Earlier in the book it seemed like reconciliation had taken place. What do you think has happened that Paul uses such ominous language?

13:11-13 Ending with a Note of Grace and Praise

Despite the tense tone of these last chapters, Paul ends with a note of thanks and praise to God, and sacred encouragement for the Corinthians.

How can we model this in our lives?