

In the last century we have advanced so much in terms of technology and medicine. Yet it doesn't feel like we are so advanced as a society. Our society is no highly-evolved utopia. We still see the age old problems of violence, hatred, turmoil, corruption, and greed. I don't feel it's any safer for kids today than it was decades ago, especially in light of events like the shooting in Florida this past week. People like to think that they can fix these problems with gun control, which may help reduce gun violence. But it won't fix the root cause of violence. It's like cold medicine that treats the symptoms, but doesn't actually cure the cold. Despite our advances in medicine, we still rely on the immune system God gave us to heal us. And likewise, the brokenness and sin in our hearts can only be healed by God through Jesus Christ. We can't fix this; only He can. But the world will never admit that it cannot fix things, because then it must admit that it needs Jesus and must submit to Him. The world hates Jesus. It's so wicked that it cannot recognize its wickedness, and hides from the Light that reveals its sin. And we are all susceptible to being influenced by this worldly way of thinking. Especially for those of us living comfortable lives relatively free from trouble, it's easy to become complacent and to be confident in our own abilities. We think things are alright now, and don't mind if Jesus doesn't come back for a while. But don't let the world deceive you. We always need Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 11:30-12:10 Paul tells us that we all must throw up our hands, kneel before Jesus, and tell Him we need Him. Remember from last week that Paul's opponents in Corinth boast about themselves to gain followers for themselves. Paul said that he too has just as much to boast about, but his goal isn't to gain followers for himself but for Jesus. Therefore Paul doesn't play their game. Instead, he boasts about his own weakness, that God's strength may be highlighted. In 11:32-33 Paul describes his failure at Damascus. Recall that Paul was on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians when Jesus converted him miraculously. Then after he reached Damascus he tried unsuccessfully to witness there and was forced to escape shamefully by being lowered in a basket from a window in the wall. This is a story of Paul's failure.

Paul's opponents boast about their achievements which makes them view themselves more highly than they ought. Paul says in chapter 12 that he could easily boast about even

greater things, like the vision God gave him of the third heaven (which refers to the dwelling place of God, the first two heavens being the dwelling of birds and the stars according to Hebrew thought). He talks about himself in the third person to distance himself and not boast. We know that in addition to the vision of heaven, Paul had a lot to boast about, like his miraculous conversion and miraculous escape from prison. But Paul doesn't want to impress people, but would rather they be impressed by Jesus. Christians should have hearts that don't think too highly of themselves. The world tempts us to be proud, but Jesus shows us how to be humble, so that we may point others to Him, that He may lift us up together with Him.

Now the only reason Paul mentioned his vision of heaven was to explain why God gave him the thorn in his flesh (vv. 7-10). This thorn may have been sickness or emotional torment. But based on the fact that almost all of his suffering mentioned so far in this book has been related to his opponents, it's likely that this thorn refers to people that were against him and against the gospel. Incidentally, we see also in Numbers 33:55 and Ezekiel 28:24 that people who opposed Israel and God were also referred to as "thorns" as well. Although Paul begged to have the thorn removed, through this thorn God made Paul recognize how much he needed Him. This thorn humbled Paul and brought him back to dependence on Jesus. Because of our education and professional background, many of us risk being so sure of ourselves that we forget that we need God. Israel is warned against this in Deuteronomy 8:1-3, 7-18. In times of abundance, it's easy to forget God and think we earned everything we have. How many times do you forget that everything we have comes from Him? Let us fall on our knees, admit that we cannot fix the brokenness in the world and in ourselves, and that we need Jesus to come back to fix everything.