

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

What are these experiences? What do we make of them? What do we do with them?

I. Christian experiences do happen!

Acts 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

Acts 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, **the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more:** and he went on his way rejoicing. **Acts 8:40** But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Acts 10:9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: **Acts 10:10** And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, **he fell into a trance, Acts 10:11** And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

This is not a miracle a day and prosperity all the way!

However, if there is a God, if we know and serve that God, then life is not limited to the ordinary or the expected or the planned!

II. Christian experiences happen.

2 Corinthians 12:1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. **2 Corinthians 12:2** I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) **such an one caught up to the third heaven. 2 Corinthians 12:3** And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) **2 Corinthians 12:4** How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

This is really the first idea that shakes up our tidy little worlds! We like well-controlled worlds that we somehow control!

Either no experiences – under our control!

Or certain experiences – under our control!

Luke 9:28 And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, **he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. Luke 9:29** And **as he prayed**, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. **Luke 9:30** And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:

Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **Acts 2:2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. **Acts 2:3** And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. **Acts 2:4** And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, **Acts 4:30** By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. **Acts 4:31** And when they had prayed, **the place was shaken** where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Thoughts:

- **Christian experience cannot be planned**
- **Christian experience has no formulas**

No 2 steps or 3 steps. No 4 requirements, no process.

Can you find Paul's formula for going to the 3rd heaven? *No*

Not sought, not taught, not suggested, not pressured, not practiced – these things just happen.

➤ **Christian experience is given unexpectedly & suddenly**

Acts 2:2 And **suddenly** there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

All of this sounds like a miracle because it is!

➤ **Christian experience is given and not necessarily given again!!!**

It happens and may / may not happen again!

How would you seek another Pentecost? Or another transfiguration? Or another Ethiopian Eunuch?

III. Christian experience happens in great variety.

What do we learn about Christian experience from 2 Corinthians 11 & 12?

- **Experience of Paradise**
- **Experience of God's "no"**
- **Experience of a thorn in the flesh**
- **Experience of God's grace**
- **Experiencing a multitude of experiences**

2 Corinthians 11:23-33 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

Romans 5:5 And **hope** maketh not ashamed; because **the love of God** is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; **but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.**

Ephesians 3:15-21 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Hebrews 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: **Hebrews 12:6** For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. **Hebrews 12:7** If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? **Hebrews 12:8** But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. **Hebrews 12:9** Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? **Hebrews 12:10** For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. **Hebrews 12:11** Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Potential pitfalls:

- **Attempting to limit your Christian experiences**

- Attempting to cause a Christian experience
- Attempting to recapture a Christian experience
- Attempting to limit, cause, or recapture the Christian experience of someone else

IV. Christian experience happens **without** explanation &/ understanding.

2 Corinthians 12:2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I **cannot** tell; or whether out of the body, I **cannot** tell: **God knoweth**;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. **2 Corinthians 12:3** And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I **cannot** tell: **God knoweth**;) **2 Corinthians 12:4** How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

This is one of the strangest insights into Christian experience – Paul wasn’t sure what all this meant!

- **Wasn’t** sure who this was
- **Wasn’t** sure when it happened
- **Wasn’t** sure exactly what happened
- He **was** sure that God knew

What happened to me – I knew what was going to happen and it happened. However, what was it?

Christian experience is not self-evident.

When do we tend to get into trouble?

V. Christian experience does **not** and should **not** happen to everyone.

2 Corinthians 12:2 I knew a man in Christ **above fourteen years ago**, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. **2 Corinthians 12:4** How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard **unspeakable words** (ἄρρητα ῥήματα), which it is **not** lawful (οὐκ ἐξὸν) for a man to utter.

Paul is quite clear about several issues:

- 1. He hadn’t talked about this for more than 14 years**
- 2. He really couldn’t talk about this!**

Unspeakable words = unutterable utterances

- 3. He was forbidden to talk about it**
- 4. He had someone else &/ something else to talk about!**

2 Corinthians 11:30 If I must needs **glory** (καυχᾶσθαι), **I will glory** (καυχήσομαι) of the things which concern **mine infirmities** (τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας μου). **2 Corinthians 11:31** The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

2 Corinthians 12:5 Of such an one **will I glory** (καυχήσομαι) yet of myself **I will not glory** (οὐ καυχήσομαι), but in **mine infirmities** (ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου). **2 Corinthians 12:6** For though I would desire **to glory** (καυχήσασθαι), I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. **2 Corinthians 12:8** For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. **2 Corinthians 12:9** And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness**. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that **the power of Christ** may rest upon me. **2 Corinthians 12:10** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses **for Christ’s sake**: for when I am weak, then am I strong.