The false apostles that had come to Corinth loved to boast in their own accomplishments (whether true or false) in order to impress the Corinthians with their "worthiness" to receive money from them. In contrast, Paul only wanted to boast in the things that God did through Him despite his weaknesses. He recognized that he could do nothing of eternal consequence without the power of God.

Paul feels compelled to list his qualifications as an apostle of Jesus Christ because the Corinthians had accepted the false apostles on the basis of their self-promotion. Paul wants to show the Corinthians that even if they compared him to the false apostles on this basis, which was an inferior way to judge apostolic qualifications, he was more qualified. However, despite reluctantly describing his own apostolic qualifications, Paul limits his boasting to the things God has done through him, not in his own accomplishments, as he says in the previous chapter: **2 Cor. 11:30** *"If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities."* The theme of glorying only in his weaknesses continues through the verses in this lesson.

1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

"It is not <u>expedient</u> *[profitable; beneficial]* **for me doubtless to glory"** – Paul reiterates the fact that there was no benefit in boasting and he was only doing it to show that the boasting of the false prophets was just empty words.
"I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord" – After listing his Jewish heritage and the many trials and persecutions that God had preserved him through, Paul now advances to another apostolic qualification he can claim: the visions and revelations that he had experienced.

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.

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago" – Most commentators believe that Paul is referring to himself. He refers to himself in the third person because he is reluctant to boast about this experience, particularly since boasting was useless (v. 1) and this experience came from God. Paul describes this experience as having happened over 14 years before writing to the Corinthians and is not recorded elsewhere in scripture.
"(whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)" – The experience was such that Paul didn't know if it was a vision or if God physically transported him to see the things he witnessed. Only God knew the truth.
"such an one caught up to the third heaven" – In scripture there are three heavens described: 1) the atmospheric heaven, where the birds fly; 2) the starry heaven of outer space; 3) the abode of God in heaven. Here, Paul describes being "caught up" to the "third heaven" where God resides. The Greek word translated "caught up" is the same one used for the rapture in 1 Thess. 4:17 and means "to sieze; to snatch."

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) 4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

"And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)" – Paul again states that he didn't know if this was a vision or a physical experience, perhaps to emphasize his passive role in the experience. The experience was something that happened to him and was not something that he initiated or controlled.
"How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" – Paul was caught up into heaven and heard words that he was not allowed to repeat. This prohibition is similar to John being forbidden to write down certain things he heard said during his vision described in Revelation (**Rev. 10:4** *"And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not"*). Obviously, there were some things said in both Paul's and John's experiences that God did not want recorded in the Bible.

5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

"Of such an one will I glory" – The experience was orchestrated by God, the One Who should get the glory, and this "one" (Paul) was only a passive participant or observer in the experience. Paul claims no glory in what happened; all glory went to God.
"yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine <u>infirmities</u> *[weaknesses]***"** – Paul refused to boast in himself except in his own weaknesses because, as he will describe in the upcoming verses, that is where the power of God shines through.

6 For though I would desire to glory, 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.

"For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool" – Paul's flesh would love to boast in himself, but he knew that would be foolish. He knew there was nothing in himself to boast about and so he refused to engage in such foolishness.
"for I will say the truth" – Unlike the false apostles, whose boasts were questionable, Paul will only describe things that were true.
"but *now* I forbear" – Apparently there were other visions and revelations that Paul had experienced, but he was going to refrain from describing them here.
"lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me" – Paul did not want the visions he had experienced to inflate anyone's opinion of him beyond what they had witnessed firsthand in his behavior as he ministered the gospel or the truths that he preached. This was in contrast to the false apostles who used every opportunity to raise people's opinion of them.

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.

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the <u>abundance</u> *[greatness; superiority]* **of the revelations"** – Paul is admitting to the human weakness of pride that we all have. By "abundance," Paul does not seem to referring to the number of revelations but to their magnitude and scope. Anyone who experienced such things might start becoming proud of the fact that God had seen fit to give them such revelations and visions. This is why God chose to take steps to humble Paul and prevent him from thinking more highly of himself than he should.
"there was given to me" – God gave Paul the thorn in the flesh that he is about to describe. God did not give it to Paul in order to punish him but to keep him humble because he loved Paul. Sometimes God allows troubles and trials to come into our life as a punishment but many times He does it to help us grow in our faith. He does both of these things because He loves us.
"a thorn in the flesh" – Paul uses multiple descriptions for this gift from God. First of all, Paul called a thorn, something that causes pain. Paul does not tell us specifically what this thorn was and commentators have debated what it may have been over the centuries since he wrote this passage. Many have suggested that Paul was talking about a health problem since it was a thorn in his "flesh."
"the <u>messenger</u> *[*aggelos: *angel]* **of Satan"** – He also describes this thorn as a "messenger" (or angel) of Satan, which implies that the thorn was of a demonic nature rather than a health issue. Paul recognized the demonic nature of this thorn and that it was targeting him. It may have been demonic oppression and/or harassment.
"to <u>buffet</u> *[to strike with the fist]* **me"** – Buffeting goes beyond being a nuisance. Paul seems to have been in a virtually constant battle dealing with this thorn and no doubt he felt that it was interfering with his ability to minister for Christ.
"lest I should be exalted above measure" – Paul repeats the reason that God had sent this thorn to him. It's possible that he may not have realized its purpose initially but began to understand it after his prayers mentioned in vs. 8-9.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

One might think that God would always answer the prayers of someone like the Apostle Paul and three times Paul pleaded with the Lord to remove this thorn from him. However, God had a purpose for this thorn in Paul's flesh and would not remove it until that purpose had been accomplished.

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.

"And he said unto me, My <u>grace</u> *[favor; kindness; good will]* **is sufficient for thee"** – We tend to think that the solution to life's problems is for God to remove them. However, God knows that sometimes the best solution (for us) to a problem is not to remove it but to give us the grace and strength to endure it. God reminds Paul that he should depend on Him when dealing with life's struggles.
"for my <u>strength</u> *[*dunamis: *power]* **is made <u>perfect</u>** *[complete; to accomplish the purpose]* **in weakness"** – The weaker we are, the more opportunity that God has to display His power for His glory. God loves demonstrate His strength through weak people since it's obvious that it's His strength that accomplishes great things (**1 Cor. 1:26-29** "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence"*).
"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my <u>infirmities</u> *[weaknesses]***, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"** – When we think we are up to the task, God steps back and let us see just how weak we truly are. Paul boasted in his weaknesses because he knew that this would be when God would intervene and accomplish far more through him than what he could without God. God gets more glory when He uses weak people do great things.

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.

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake" – Instead of feeling overwhelmed when he felt totally insufficient to face the trials and persecutions that came against him because of Jesus Christ, Paul was pleased because he knew that God was about to come on the scene and give him the strength to endure.
"for when I am weak, then am I strong" – God does not intervene where we think we are strong because then we would think that it was our strength that accomplished the victory. However, the weaker we are, the more glory God gets. Paul understood that when he was weak, God's power would more than make up for what he lacked. When Paul was "strong" then he only had his own power as his disposal.

Verses 11-21: Paul again acknowledges the foolishness of boasting in oneself despite finding it necessary to do so in order to defend his apostleship. Paul reminds them of the "signs of an apostle" that they saw while he ministered to them and tells them that he intends to continue not being a financial burden to them when he returns. His intent, and the intent of the men that he sent to them, was not to get financial gain from them but that the Corinthians would gain the spiritual benefits of their ministry.