

**AN ANALYSIS OF PAUL’S BOASTING
IN 2 CORINTHIANS 10–13
USING CONTEMPORARY HUMILITY THEORIES**



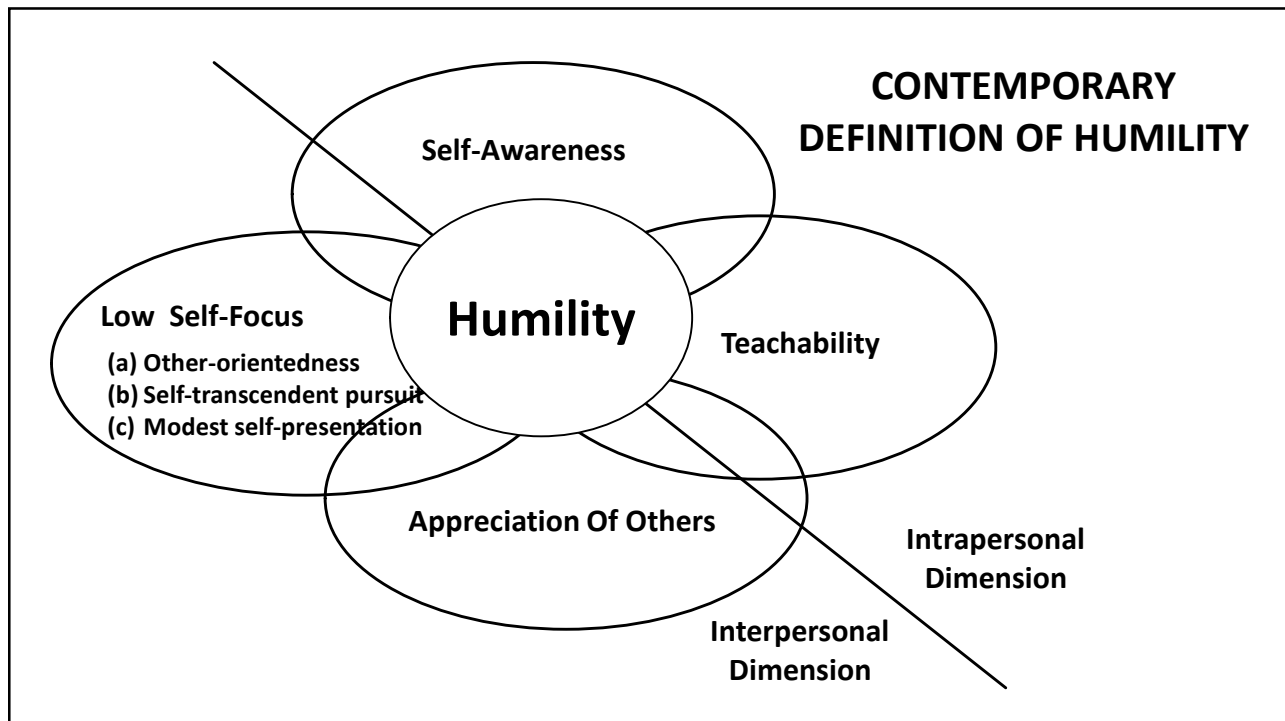
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**PAUL'S INTRAPERSONAL HUMILITY (HIS SENSE OF SELF)
IN 2 COR 10–13**

*Paul Portrays
Himself as
“Humble”*



*Paul Boasts to
Defend His
Honor*

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PAUL PORTRAYS HIMSELF AS “HUMBLE” IN 2 COR 10–13

- *Paul embraces weakness (ἀσθέν- root) to express reliance on the Lord's power (power-in-weakness)*
- *Paul applies humility words (ταπειν- root) to himself in 2 Cor 10:1 (ταπεινός); 11:7 (ταπεινώω); and 12:21 (ταπεινώω)*

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PAUL PORTRAYS HIMSELF AS “HUMBLE” IN 2 COR 10–13 (CONT)

- *2 Cor 10:1 – “I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness [πραΰτης] and gentleness [ἐπιείκεια] of Christ—I who am humble [ταπεινός] when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away” (ESV)*

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PAUL PORTRAYS HIMSELF AS “HUMBLE” IN 2 COR 10–13 (CONT)

- *2 Cor 11:7–10 – “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself [ἐμαυτὸν ταπεινῶν] so that you might be exalted [ὕμεις ὑψωθῆτε], because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? ...” (ESV)*
 - *Very “un-Greek” and “un-Roman” (Wengst, Humility)*

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PAUL PORTRAYS HIMSELF AS “HUMBLE” IN 2 COR 10–13 (CONT)

- *In 2 Cor 10–13 Paul also expresses limitations and vulnerabilities by portraying himself as being:*
 - *afraid (11:2–3; 12:20–21)*
 - *anxious (11:28)*
 - *unskilled in speech (11:6)*

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PAUL PORTRAYS HIMSELF AS A RELUCTANT & FOOLISH BOASTER IN 2 COR 10–13

- *Plutarch’s essay “On Praising Oneself Inoffensively” provides insight into conventions for self-praise in Paul’s day*
- *Analyzing Paul’s boasting in 2 Cor 10-13 shows that Paul fits Plutarch’s guidelines with 3 exceptions:*
 - *1. Rather than boasting in his triumph over adversity and lowliness, Paul boasts in weaknesses (11:30–33; 12:5, 9)*
 - *2. Paul engaged in self-praise while censuring others; however, his boasts had tone of self-humiliation rather than competitive self-praise*
 - *3. Paul referred to himself with self-degrading terminology – referencing punishments and weaknesses*

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**PAUL PORTRAYS HIMSELF AS A RELUCTANT & FOOLISH
BOASTER IN 2 COR 10–13 (CONT)**

- ***Paul Qualified His Boasting:***
 - ***He boasted in God’s provision (10:12–18)***
 - ***He boasted in the Lord (10:17)***
 - ***He boasted in weakness (11:30; 12:9–10)***
 - ***He boasted as a fool (11:1a; 11:16-12:10)***
 - ***He boasted reluctantly (11:18; 12:11)***

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EVALUATING PAUL’S INTRAPERSONAL HUMILITY IN 2 COR 10–13

Humility Characteristic	Paul’s Intrapersonal Humility
Self-awareness	Paul presents himself as being limited, weak, and humble. He admits limitations in speaking abilities (11:6), fear of being humiliated by the Corinthians’ lack of repentance (12:21), fear that the Corinthians will be led astray (11:3), and anxiety over the churches (11:28). Paul vulnerably admits his limits and in so doing demonstrates his concern for the Corinthians.
Teachability	Paul also presents himself as being teachable. He shows that Christ’s example impacted his own understanding of humility. His effort to align himself with Christ led him to modify the meaning of “humility”—transforming the negative meaning of humility as a low socio-economic term to a positive relational humility that aligns with Christ’s own gentleness and meekness. Through the context, Paul presents humility as a more positive, virtuous behavior which he learned from the Lord’s example. Additionally, Paul portrays himself as learning from the thorn incident. Through the humiliation of the thorn and the message from the Lord in 12:9, Paul learned to accept weakness.
Appreciation of others	Since the focus of the analysis is on Paul’s view of himself, his appreciation of others’ contributions is not visible in the examined texts, though it is more evident when examining his interpersonal dimension of humility.
Low self-focus	Paul presents himself as having multiple components of low self-focus. He portrays himself as focused on and concerned for the Corinthians’ well-being. In 11:7 he indicates that he humbled himself so that the Corinthians might be exalted, demonstrating other-orientedness. He also portrays his refusal of financial support as being motivated by his desire to help them (11:9; 12:13–16). In addition to his other-orientedness, Paul also portrays himself as one who exercises self-modesty. He boasted to address the accusations of the opponents and to regain the loyalty of the Corinthians. However, his boasting was within the norms of his day except where he emphasized weakness and humiliation. By emphasizing weakness and humiliation, Paul counteracted his boastfulness and expressed self-modesty. Similarly, his efforts to continually qualify his boasting (in the Lord, in weakness, as foolishness, and with reluctance) also indicates an effort to downplay the boasting and to present himself with modesty. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, he also continually portrays the Lord as his primary focus, which demonstrates the self-transcendent pursuit component of low self-focus and exhibits theological humility.

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HUMBLE LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM PAUL

- 1. Aware of cultural norms, Paul cautiously engaged in self-praise to address real issues that his readers faced.*
- 2. Even when boasting, Paul highlighted his humility.*
- 3. Paul went outside of his comfort zone to address the issues at hand.*
- 4. Paul turned his boasting into an opportunity to praise the Lord.*