Let’s begin by reading a little earlier in the passage to get context:

> *2 Corinthians 12:2-4 (NIV)*
> *“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know God knows. And I know that this man whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.”*

Paul is clearly referring to a mystical, supernatural experience either a vision or a spiritual journey where he was caught up beyond the earthly realm to the “third heaven,” a Jewish term for God’s dwelling place (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2). The “third heaven” is distinguished from the first heaven (sky) and the second heaven (space or realm of celestial bodies). Here, Paul describes hearing “inexpressible things” (Greek: *alogēta*, meaning “unspeakable” or “indescribable”) that he was forbidden to reveal to others. The phrase “no one is permitted” (Greek: *ouk exestin*) underscores the holiness and mystery of these revelations some divine truths are so sacred they cannot be shared.

The concept of things being “not permitted” or “forbidden” appears elsewhere in Scripture, emphasizing moral and covenantal boundaries:

> *Genesis 34:7 (NIV)*
> *“When Jacob’s sons heard what had happened, they were deeply distressed and very angry because their sister had been treated in a way that was forbidden among the Israelites.”*

In this case, “forbidden” (Hebrew: *lo yezul*) relates to God’s moral law and the sanctity of the family covenant. The violation angered Jacob’s sons because it broke God’s ethical standards for His people.

The idea of “not permitted” has both doctrinal and ethical dimensions in the Christian life. Spiritually, certain divine mysteries and heavenly revelations are guarded by God’s sovereignty and holiness, as Paul experienced. Ethically, believers are called to live lives separated from sin and worldly passions. The New Testament calls Christians to holiness because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

For the believer who is “born again,” it is *not permitted* (i.e., contrary to God’s will and moral order) to:

- Love the world in a way that rejects God (1 John 2:15-17)
- Continue living in habitual sin and indulgence (Romans 6:1-2)
- Engage in blasphemy, theft, deceit, sexual immorality, drunkenness, or idolatry (Galatians 5:19-21)
- Associate closely with unbelievers in ways that compromise faith (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)

Instead, believers are called to pursue holiness actively:

> *Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)*
> *“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”*

Holiness is not optional it is essential to seeing and experiencing God. This means a daily commitment to purity, obedience, and faithfulness, taking up one’s cross to follow Jesus (Luke 9:23).

- Paul’s “not permitted” words reflect sacred divine mysteries reserved by God.
- Scripture consistently emphasizes boundaries that protect God’s people morally and spiritually.
- Christians must live lives set apart, reflecting God’s holiness in thought, word,

and deed.

May the Lord bless and strengthen us in our walk of holiness.

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