

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 11

Introduction

A great deal of boasting goes on in Christian ministries. Numbers are at the heart of most of the boasting:

1. We boast about the number of people who attend.
2. We boast about the number of people who respond in some way to the message.
3. We boast about the amount of money people give.

Is it right to boast? At the end of chapter ten Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 10:17 But *“he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”*

“Glories” is another word for *boasts*. “He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.” It **is** right to boast – **as long as you boast about the right things.**

Paul boasted about two “right” things in chapter eleven. They were his *jealousy* and his *jeopardy*. We’ll organize our thoughts around these two points: #1 If You Must Boast, Boast About Your Jealousy, and #2 If You Must Boast, Boast About Your Jeopardy.

#1 If You Must Boast,
Boast About Your Jealousy
(v1-15)

In Paul’s absence, certain false teachers had crept in to the church at Corinth. They were accusing him and attacking him – tearing him down in order to build-up themselves. As we will see throughout this chapter, these false teachers made many boasts about themselves. They boasted so much that Paul sarcastically referred to them in verse five as “the most eminent apostles.” If he were writing today, Paul would have called them “super apostles.”

Paul was reluctant to match their boasting. Nevertheless he had to say something because their boasting was harming the fellowship. Paul must boast; but he must boast in the Lord. He begins by boasting of his jealousy. Paul was jealous as a *father* would be, and as a *founder* would be.

Paul was a jealous father:

2 Corinthians 11:1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

2 Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.

As I said, Paul was reluctant to boast. He considered boasting “folly.” But since he must boast, he boasted in his “godly jealousy” for the Corinthians. The little word “for” is of extreme importance in this discussion. He was not jealous **of** them, or **of** the false teachers whom they were now following. That kind of jealousy would be selfish and destructive. No, he was jealous **for** them. It was a selfless, constructive jealousy that had their best interests in mind.

Paul compared himself to a father and they to his virgin daughter. The false teachers were like suitors who had the wrong intentions. *You dad’s can instantly relate!* In the culture of the New Testament, couples would become betrothed for up to a year before getting married. During that time the father had the privilege and responsibility of preparing his daughter to be wed – and that included keeping his daughter pure and undefiled from other suitors who sought only their own pleasure and would seduce the naïve young virgin. Paul’s jealousy was a godly jealousy for their own good.

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

The serpent encouraged Eve to doubt God’s Word. These false teachers were encouraging the believers at Corinth to doubt God’s Word as it was taught to them by Paul. They told the believers that the message Paul taught was incomplete; it was too “simple.” Typically these false teachers were Judaizers who added works to the grace of God and told the believers they must keep rules, rites, and rituals from the Jewish law in order to *attain* and *maintain* their salvation.

Let me say something about “the simplicity that is in Christ.” The Gospel is not simplistic; but it is simple. There is nothing simplistic about salvation by grace through faith alone. Volumes have been written exploring the depth of the wisdom of God in providing a way of salvation for the human race. Yet, at the same time, the Gospel **is** simple. It appeals to a child as readily as an old man; it is not difficult to receive. You must resist *any* and *every* effort to add to “the simplicity that is in Christ.”

2 Corinthians 11:4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

“Another Jesus” means any teaching about Jesus that is contrary to His nature as revealed in the Bible. It certainly includes the cults; but it also includes perversions of Jesus within orthodox churches.

“A different spirit” and “a different Gospel” both probably refer to adding the works of the law to grace in order to be saved. In all this you again see Paul’s godly jealousy for them.

The amazing thing is how readily believers “put up with it!” Why do we put up with it? According to the next few verses, we put up with it because the false teachers *act* and *argue* so effectively.

2 Corinthians 11:5 For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.
2 Corinthians 11:6 Even though *I am* untrained in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things.

These guys acted like “super apostles” compared to Paul. Paul was “untrained in speech,” indicating that they were trained. This means that they had an artificial, stylized, professional form of oratory. Paul pointed out that it is *substance* and not *style* that is important. He spoke to them in a simple conversational style that emphasized the content of the message.

These false teachers also argued effectively:

2 Corinthians 11:7 Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?
2 Corinthians 11:8 I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you.
2 Corinthians 11:9 And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep *myself*.

Paul had taught the Corinthians, in First Corinthians 9:9, that it was proper for a minister to receive wages from his congregation. Yet he took no wages from them! His accusers said that he took no wages because he knew he was an inferior apostle. Paul said he took no wages because, as a founder of churches, he wanted to establish that the Gospel is not for gain. He allowed churches he had already established to help support him.

Paul was jealous as a father. He was also jealous as a founder. The work at Corinth, and others Paul founded, were especially dear to him. He was not a hireling who came along after the hard work was done.

2 Corinthians 11:10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

2 Corinthians 11:11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!

2 Corinthians 11:12 But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.

Paul would not succumb to their argument and begin to receive support from churches he was founding. He wanted to emphasize that he ministered out of love for the Lord and not for gain. One of the ways you could flush-out these false teachers was to quit supporting them.

As a founder of churches, Paul refused to burden those he was ministering among. It was a founder's godly jealousy to see them properly established.

His love for them, and his godly jealousy for them, expressed itself in honest but straightforward rebuke of the false teachers:

2 Corinthians 11:13 For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

2 Corinthians 11:15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

These guys were the ministers of Satan. Don't be confused if they call themselves "apostles"; if they act and argue effectively. Analyze their message. "Ministers of righteousness" means that they promote self-righteousness and the keeping of the law. That's why their "end

will be according to their works.” They were trusting in works, which cannot save you. Their end will be eternal separation from God.

If you must boast, boast about your godly jealousy for God’s people. Paul was jealous as a father would be, and as a founder would be.

#2 If You Must Boast, Boast In Your Jeopardy (v16-33)

As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul was in constant jeopardy. These next verses summarize the perils he had endured.

2 Corinthians 11:16 I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.

2 Corinthians 11:17 What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.

2 Corinthians 11:18 Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.

2 Corinthians 11:19 For you put up with fools gladly, since you *yourselves* are wise!

Paul was acting as a “fool” because the Corinthians were listening to fools. Paul spoke in a way they would heed – even though it was “not according to the Lord.” It was not characteristic of Jesus to boast as a fool. Paul felt it necessary in this case because of the foolishness of the believers at Corinth. He accommodated their foolishness.

2 Corinthians 11:20 For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours *you*, if one takes *from you*, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.

2 Corinthians 11:21 To *our* shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.

I think we should take this as an accurate summary of how the “super apostles” were treating the believers. They were bringing them into the “bondage” of legalism, “devouring” their resources, “taking” away the simplicity that is in Christ, and “exalting” themselves. They were quite literally “striking” them “on the face” – enforcing their teaching by using violence. Paul sarcastically said he was too “weak” for that.

Turning to their boasts, Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 11:22 Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I.

These guys were proud of their Jewish heritage. They had nothing on Paul! Too bad that pedigree has nothing to do with being spiritual.

2 Corinthians 11:23 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more...

These guys boasted of their accomplishments in ministry. Their accomplishments were nothing compared to Paul's. He lists some of them:

“In labors more abundant.” This is a general comment indicating he simply worked harder and more strenuously than the false teachers.

“In stripes above measure” refer to frequent beatings.

“In prisons more frequently.” By the time of this writing, the only recorded imprisonment was at Philippi. Apparently there were others not recorded in Scripture... And there would be others still to come.

“In deaths often” refers to the very real risk of death Paul faced, often from angry mobs.

2 Corinthians 11:24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one.

The Mosaic law prescribed a maximum of forty lashes. This was traditionally limited to thirty-nine so as not to exceed the legal limit!

2 Corinthians 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods...

This was the Gentile version of being whipped. It's commonly called caning. Even though he was a Roman citizen, and therefore exempt from caning, three times the punishment was inflicted before he claimed his citizenship.

“Once I was stoned.” This is recorded in Acts fourteen.

“Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I have been in the deep.” These were all before the really heavy-duty shipwreck in Acts twenty-seven.

2 Corinthians 11:26 *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;

Paul's frequent journeys were not pleasant excursions but dangerous travels. Swollen rivers caused real peril. Robbers were a threat to any traveler. Danger hounded Paul's steps, both from persecuting Jews and from Gentiles. Whether he was in city or desert, or at sea, he faced continual danger in pursuing his service for Christ. There were dangers at sea other than shipwreck which had been previously mentioned. One of the threats he faced was posed by false brethren. Perhaps he had in mind Judaizing opponents who were bitter against him and did not hesitate to stir up Christians against him, and would even report him to the authorities if it would remove him from the scene.

"Weariness and toil" was an expression Paul used of his manual labor to support himself. "Sleeplessness" refers to the sleepless nights he endured, working late to support himself so he would not burden the church. "Hunger and thirst" were sometimes his experience when his own labors did not fully supply his needs. "In fastings often" does not seem to refer here to voluntary fasts, but to those times when food ran out altogether, or when other circumstances made eating impossible. He also knew what it was to have insufficient clothing, especially when traveling on long journeys when nights were cold and accommodations primitive.

2 Corinthians 11:28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?

Paul cared deeply for the churches, and for each struggling, suffering believer in every church.

His accusers could boast of none of these things. They were in the ministry for the money. **They** often put Paul's life in jeopardy; but they never faced any jeopardy.

As he ends the chapter, Paul recounts an incident he was especially proud of:

2 Corinthians 11:30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

2 Corinthians 11:31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

2 Corinthians 11:32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me;

2 Corinthians 11:33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

Paul was a basket-case! It sounds funny, but that was his boast. Here he was, the great Saul – persecutor of the church. Then Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus and saved him. Instead of being hailed by the religious leaders at Damascus, he was hounded by them. He barely escaped with his life in a most embarrassing manner.

As Paul looked back on his ministry, this one event summarized all his boasting. He boasted about the jeopardy his life was in. His being let down by a basket was a symbol of what it meant to surrender to Jesus Christ. It was a moment of glorious weakness and complete dependence upon the Lord.

If you must boast, make sure it's about the jeopardy your life is in because you have surrendered to Jesus. Boast about moments of glorious weakness and complete dependence upon the Lord.

Conclusion

Jealousy and **jeopardy** are the boasts of an apostle. They should be your boasts as well. Otherwise, keep quiet about your accomplishments.