

**Paul's Defense of His Foolish Boasting**  
**2 Corinthians 11:7-12**  
**Part Two**

The issue of personal rights is a big issue for Americans. In fact, our constitution, as it presently exists, would never have come into being apart from a compromise worked out between two groups, known as the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, that resulted in the ratification of ten amendments to our constitution that we presently refer to as our Bill of Rights.

And ever since that day, when those ten original amendments to our constitution were ratified, the discussion of personal rights has been at the forefront of the American scene. And that is a wonderful thing about being an American: personal rights matter.

But now let me say this. Though personal rights do matter, they should not trump our devotion to Christ. Or in other words, when it comes to exercising our rights, we should never choose to do so at the expense of the gospel of Christ or the advancement of Christ's kingdom. And a person that I believe can make this truth come alive for us is the Apostle Paul.

So now let us return back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and see if this is not so. So where are we exactly in respect to our current study?

Paul, in **2 Corinthians 10:12-18** had just contrasted the improper boasting of his opponents with his proper boasting.

So why did Paul consider the boasting of his opponents to be improper and his boasting proper? Paul considered his opponents' boasting improper and his boasting proper because his opponents' boasting focused on their credentials and accomplishments while his boasting focused on the grace of God, both in his life and ministry.

This was the difference between Paul and his opponents and Paul hoped that as the Corinthians pondered that difference that the Corinthians would conclude, based on that difference, that he in fact was the true apostle and that his opponents were in fact the false apostles.

But now having established this difference between his opponents' improper boasting and his proper boasting in **2 Corinthians 10:12-18**, Paul announced to the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 11:1** his intent to deviate from his previous pattern of boasting (exclusively) in the Lord, or in other words Paul announced his intent to deviate from his previous pattern of boasting properly. And how did Paul introduce this intent to deviate from his previous pattern of boasting (exclusively) in the Lord? He did this by asking the Corinthians to bear with him **“in a little foolishness.”**

Let us now read **2 Corinthians 11:1** and see if this is not so. **“I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness.”** So what was this **“foolishness?”**

Was it the foolishness of boasting in the Lord? No! Rather it was the foolishness of not boasting in the Lord, or in other words it was the foolishness of boasting in one's credentials and accomplishments. This was what Paul was referring to when he told the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 11:1** **“I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness.”**

So was Paul actually going to do this? Was he actually going to stop boasting in the Lord so that he might boast in his credentials and accomplishments? Yes, he was absolutely going to do this, which we will eventually see in **2 Corinthians 11:21-23** and **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**.

But before he reluctantly engaged himself in this kind of **“foolishness,”** Paul, as I told you several weeks ago, believed that he first must prepare his readers for what he was about to do. So in **2 Corinthians 11:2-15** Paul began to lay out for his readers his defense for having to engage in this kind of foolish boasting, which led us to the question that we are now in the process answering.

And what is this question? How did Paul defend his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting in 2 Corinthians 11:2-15?

First of all, as we discovered several weeks ago, Paul defended his willingness to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting by highlighting his godly jealousy for the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:2-6).

So let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 11:2-6** and see if this is not so. **“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. (3) But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (4) For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. (5) For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. (6) But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.”** So in these verses do we see Paul defending his willingness to engage in foolish boasting by highlighting his godly jealousy for the Corinthians? And the answer I believe would be yes.

But Paul was not done defending his willingness to engage in foolish boasting. So how else did he do it?

Paul defended his willingness to engage in foolish boasting by highlighting his no-charge policy and its implications (2 Corinthians 11:7-12). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 11:7-12** and see if this is not so.

**“Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? (8) I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; (9) and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. (10) As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. (11) Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! (12) But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”**

So do we see Paul in these verses defending his willingness to engage in foolish boasting by highlighting his no-charge policy and its implications? And I believe that the answer would have to be yes!

So, what is my hope for this message? My hope as we consider Paul's no-charge policy and its implications is that we might come to understand that even though we might have personal rights we, as the followers of Christ, choose to exercise those rights if in doing we will some way cause a hindrance to the gospel of Christ or the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

So now let us begin to take a closer look at these verses. And we will begin with **verse 7**, which was a question, an absurd question, addressed to the Corinthians by Paul. And what was his question? **“Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?”** And what would be the answer that Paul would have expected from the Corinthians to this absurd question? The answer that Paul would have expected would have been something like this, “Paul, of course you did not commit any sin when you humbled yourself, or in other words when you adopted your no-charge policy in order that we might be exalted.” This of course would be the obvious response that he would have expected. So, what is going on here?

Did Paul really preach the gospel of God among the Corinthians without charge? Yes, that is true! He chose neither to charge them nor to receive anything from them. And why did he choose neither to charge them nor receive anything from them? Was it because he did not have the right to charge them or to receive anything from them? No! That was not the reason.

Paul chose his no-charge policy because he did not want to cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ according to 1 Corinthians 9:1-12.

But even in spite of this extensive instruction concerning his no-charge policy and why he had adopted his no-charge policy in **1 Corinthians**, Paul once again felt compelled to return back to this very same topic in **2 Corinthians 11:7-12**. So why did Paul feel compelled to do this? Why did Paul feel compelled to return back to this very same topic?

Though Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:1-12 made it clear that he adopted his no-charge policy because he did not want to cause any hindrance to the gospel, it still did not prevent the false apostles from attacking him because of his no-charge policy.

So, what was the issue? Why would his no-charge policy cause such a stink and make it possible for his opponents to attack Paul in Corinth?

Most likely the primary problem was that from Plato through Paul's day, the Sophists (the philosophy teachers) and the professional orators charged fees and took money for their teaching, persuading those people that listened to them that this was not only the right thing to do but the necessary thing to do, if what they were teaching, was in fact valuable.

Therefore if someone came along representing themselves as a teacher and did not charge, it could expose them to the attack that they were a worthless messenger proclaiming a worthless message. And this appears to be exactly what happened with Paul.

Paul's opponents were seeking to convince the Corinthians that because of his no-charge policy he was a worthless messenger proclaiming a worthless message and was therefore an apostolic deceiver. And apparently this attack had made some sense to certain Corinthians.

But obviously this was the furthest thing from the truth, and this is why Paul asked the absurd question that he did in **verse 7**. He asked the Corinthians this absurd question so that the Corinthians might be able to cut through the fog that had been created by his opponents' attacks. So, what did Paul want the Corinthians to see?

He wanted them to see that he did not adopt his no-charge policy because he was a worthless messenger preaching a worthless message but rather, as we can clearly see in **verse 7**, because he wanted the Corinthians to be **“exalted”** or in other words **“saved.”** This is why Paul adopted his no-charge policy and this is what Paul wanted the Corinthians to see.

But now let us expand our discussion of Paul's no-charge policy a little further. Was Corinth the only church that Paul did not charge to preach the gospel? And what would be the answer? And the answer would have to be no, of course not!

Paul's no-charge policy was Paul's common practice when taking the gospel into an area where the gospel had never been preached (1 Corinthians 9:6). I believe we see this inference in **1 Corinthians 9:6** when Paul, referencing

his partnership with Barnabas on his very first missionary journey, spoke of how he and Barnabas had practiced this very same no-charge policy as they sought to expand the reach of the gospel into areas where the gospel had never been preached.

When it came to the gospel, and taking the gospel into areas where the gospel had never been preached, Paul, as well as men like Barnabas, for the sake of the gospel and the advancement of Christ's kingdom, chose not to exercise their rights to be supported through the gospel. Or in other words, they refused to take money from the people that they through the preaching of the gospel were seeking to "exalt" or "save."

Now did this continue forever? Now did they continue to refuse to take money? No? Paul's no-charge policy ended when the churches he had founded willingly and as an expression of God's grace extended gifts to support him and his ministry. So how do we know this?

Let us now continue to read **2 Corinthians 11:8-9** and see if this is not so. And what do these two verses say? **"I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; (9) and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so."** So did Paul's no-charge policy end when the churches he had founded, willingly and as an expression of God's grace extended gifts to support him and his ministry? Absolutely! For otherwise Paul would never have taken the money from the Macedonians. So what was the significance of Paul telling the Corinthians that he had received money from the Macedonians?

Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:8-9 explained how the gifts given to him by the Macedonians, while in Corinth, were used by him to support his no-charge policy in Corinth.

What an ironic situation. Here was Paul not living with the Macedonians, nor ministering to the Macedonians, willingly taking money from the Macedonians in order to serve the Corinthians. And how did Paul describe this very ironic situation in **verse 8**? He described it as robbery. Now obviously he was not using this term in a literal sense but in a figurative in order to make a point. And certainly this term "rob" would make a point.

The word “to rob” (SYLAO) is a military term to describe the stripping of the armor from a dead soldier on the field of battle.

Obviously Paul chose a very strong word to communicate to the Corinthians the great lengths that he had been willing to go to in order to serve them and not to become a burden to them. And how far was Paul willing to go?

In order to serve them and not to become a burden to them he was even willing to take money from churches where he was not ministering to minister to them.

So let me ask you a question. When a person has been willing to put themselves out for you and give themselves up for you so that you yourself might not be burdened, and to do so in such an extraordinary way that their action could even be considered shocking such as was the case when Paul robbed the Macedonians to serve the Corinthians, would you think that it would communicate to you that the person really cares for you? And I would like to think that your answer would be yes. And this is what Paul would hope that the Corinthians would see.

He did not adopt his no-charge policy because he was a worthless messenger with a worthless message but rather because he cared for them and wanted them to be exalted.

But now let me carry this thought a little bit further. If an individual has been willing to put themselves out for us in an extraordinary way, perhaps even in a shocking way, then goes on with an oath to communicate their intention to continue to do so, wouldn't this in our minds magnify their care for us? And believe it would.

And this brings us to **2 Corinthians 11:10-11**. So now let me now read these verses for you. **“As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. (11) Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!”**

Paul reinforced his commitment to continue on with his no-charge policy with two brief back-to-back oaths (2 Corinthians 11:10-11).



So where do we find the first oath? We find the first oath in **2 Corinthians 11:10**. **“As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.”** Paul’s opponents saw his refusal to take money as a clear indication that he was a deceiver. But Paul saw it for what it was – objective evidence that he was in fact a follower of Christ. And then Paul appealing to this objective evidence declared to the Corinthians that he was not about to change his no-charge policy in Corinth and the area around Corinth. In other words, he in effect said to the Corinthians, “This no-charge policy may be hard on me but I will continue with this policy as long as it is necessary.”

It should have been obvious to the Corinthians that what he had chosen to do among them or had chosen not to do among them was all about them and not about him. But Paul knew that the Corinthians were struggling to see the obvious.

So he continued on and resorted to a second oath. And where do we find this second oath? We find it in **2 Corinthians 10:11**. **“Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!** Paul’s opponents were so far gone, so perverted in their indictment of Paul, that Paul called God as a witness of his love for the Corinthians. What did he say to the Corinthians? He said, “God knows I love you.”

So, what did Paul hope would be the consequence of him declaring his love for them and his intention to continue his no-charge policy with them as long as it was necessary no matter how difficult this policy might have been on him? He hoped that not only that it would confirm his boast that he was a true apostle of Christ, but also expose his opponents’ similar boast to be false. This is what he hoped would happen.

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 11:12** and see if this is not so. **“But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”**

Paul’s commitment to continue on with his no-charge policy was designed by Paul to expose the fraudulent apostolic claims of his opponents (2 Corinthians 11:12).



The issue of personal rights is a big issue for Americans. In fact, our constitution, as it presently exists, would never have come into being apart from a compromise worked out between two groups, known as the Federalists” and the Anti-Federalists, that resulted in the ratification of ten amendments to our constitution that we presently refer to as our Bill of Rights.

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However though personal rights do matter they should not trump our devotion to Christ. If our right to comfort, to pleasure, to entertainment, to advancement, to success ever in our minds interferes with the proclamation of Christ’s gospel or the advancement of Christ’s kingdom, we must be willing to set aside our rights so that the gospel of Christ and the kingdom of Christ might continue to advance.

May God so fill us with His grace that when we find it necessary to give up our rights for the sake of the gospel and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom that we would do so gladly.