

**Minimizing the Risks of Foolish Boasting
2 Corinthians 11:16-21**

How did Paul attempt to protect the Corinthians from misunderstanding his willingness to engage in foolish boasting?

First of all, Paul sought to protect the Corinthians by appealing to them for a fair hearing (2 Corinthians 11:16). So where do we see this appeal? We see this appeal in **2 Corinthians 11:16**. And what did Paul say? **“Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little.”** Paul wanted the Corinthians to see him as a wise man doing wise things, and not as a fool doing foolish things, but even if they were not able to see him, at that particular time, in that particular way, he appealed to them to receive him even as foolish, or in other words he appealed to them to give him a fair hearing.

This appeal is very similar to the appeal that he made earlier to the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 11:1** just prior to him defending his willingness to engage in foolish boasting in **2 Corinthians 11:2-15**.

Paul wanted very much to protect the Corinthians from his opponents whom he had just declared to be false apostles, deceitful workers who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ. And how had he decided to protect them? He had decided to protect them by engaging in what he considered **“foolish boasting,”** but foolish boasting is not without risks.

Paul knew this. He knew there were risks, but in an attempt to protect the Corinthians from his opponents while minimizing the risks of utilizing this particular tactic of foolish boasting he appealed to them to give him a fair hearing, believing that if they gave him a fair hearing, not only would they be more inclined to be protected from his opponents, but even the risks associated with his “foolish boasting” would be minimized. Why?

If they gave him a fair hearing they would be far more likely to see that the clear intent of his self-disclosures was not to exalt himself, but rather it was to protect them while seeking ultimately to honor and glorify God.

So how else did Paul seek to protect the Corinthians from misunderstanding his willingness to engage in foolish boasting?

Paul sought to protect the Corinthians by acknowledging that his willingness to engage in foolish boasting was in response to his opponents' threat rather than in response to the Lord's example (2 Corinthians 11:17-18). So where do we see this? We see it in **2 Corinthians 11:17-18.**

Let me now read these verses for you. **“What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. (18) Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.”** So did Paul acknowledge that his willingness to engage in foolish boasting was in response to his opponents' threat rather than in response to the Lord's example in **2 Corinthians 11:17-18**? I believe, based on these verses, that the answer would have to be yes.

So let us take a closer look at these verses and see if this is not so. We will begin with **verse 17.** And what did Paul say at the beginning of **verse 17**? **“What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would.”** So, what did Paul mean by this?

It meant that Paul understood that when he began to boast according to his credentials and accomplishments, as he planned to do, and not according to the grace, and the gifts that God had poured out upon him, he would be boasting not as the Lord would, or perhaps better said, not in accordance with the Lord's example but rather as a fool, or as **verse 17** goes on to say, **“as in foolishness.”**

And doesn't it make sense that this is exactly how Paul would view such boasting? Consider what he said to the Corinthians already in **1 Corinthians 4:7.** **“For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”**

So based on these words, doesn't what Paul said in **2 Corinthians 11:17** make perfect sense when he, in anticipation of what he was about to do, said to the Corinthians, **“What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness?”** Absolutely!

So did Paul know that boasting in one's credentials and accomplishments was not according to the Lord's example and the epitome of foolishness? Yes, he did! And did he want the Corinthians to understand that he

understood this? Absolutely! This is why he just said what he said in **verse 17**.

But even though he knew that what he was about to say was not in accordance with the example of Christ and would in fact be just a bunch of foolishness, he wanted the Corinthians to know this did not mean that he was not confident that what he was about to say about his credentials and accomplishments was exactly what the Lord would have him to say.

So let us now look at the very last part of **verse 17** and see if this is not so. **“What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting.”**

The word “confidence” (HUPOSTASEI) literally means “foundation,” and what was his foundation for boasting in the way that he was about to boast? Was the foundation of his boasting that he believed his boasting was according to the Lord’s example and therefore not **“as in foolishness?”** No, it was not! Paul had just made that clear.

So, what was the “foundation” or “confidence” of Paul’s boasting? The foundation or confidence of Paul’s boasting was this is what he believed he had to do as the Lord’s apostle to serve those to whom he had been sent.

And why would I say this? Let us go on to **verse 18**. **“Since many [referring to his opponents in Corinth] boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.”** Paul had not chosen to boast in the way he was about to boast in a vacuum. It was in response to his opponents in Corinth who in boasting according to the flesh had found great success. So therefore, Paul in response to their success and seeking to protect the Corinthians, felt compelled before the Lord as an apostle of Christ to rise up in a similar way, so that he might do all that he could possibly do in order to protect the Corinthians from the influence of his opponents.

But again, Paul was not stupid and he knew there were risks in utilizing this particular tactic. Therefore in an attempt to protect the Corinthians from his opponents while minimizing the risks of utilizing this particular tactic of foolish boasting, he acknowledged that his willingness to engage in foolish boasting was in response to his opponents’ threat rather than in response to the Lord’s example.

And what did he hope to gain by this? He hoped that pointing this out to the Corinthians that they would be able to see that the clear intent of his self-disclosures, that he was about to lay about before them, was not to exalt himself, but rather it was to protect them while seeking ultimately to honor and glorify God.

So how else did Paul seek to protect the Corinthians from misunderstanding his willingness to engage in foolish boasting?

Paul sought to protect the Corinthians by helping them to see the stark difference between the relationship they had with his opponents versus the relationship they had with him (2 Corinthians 11:19-21). So where do we see this? We see this in **2 Corinthians 11:19-21**.

Let me now read these verses for you. **“For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. (20) For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. (21) To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.”** So did Paul in these verses seek to help the Corinthians to see the stark difference between the relationship they had with his opponents versus the relationship they had with him? And I believe that the answer would have to yes.

So now let us look at these verses more carefully and see if this is not so. So let us begin with **verse 19** and what does it say? **“For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly.”** So, what is he trying to communicate in this verse?

In contrast to Paul’s foolishness that he highlighted in **2 Corinthians 11:19**, he now ironically identified the Corinthians who continued to remain enamored by his opponents as **“wise.”**

So, what is the irony? The irony is that those whom he referred to as wise, or in other words the Corinthians who had continued to be enamored by his opponents were fact the true fools, for their continued toleration of his opponents had consequences.

So, what were these consequences? There were five different consequences that Paul outlined for us in **2 Corinthians 11:20**.

Paul's opponents had enslaved them. What does it say in **verse 20**? **“For you tolerate it if anyone [referring to his opponents] enslaves you.”** And how did they do that? It probably meant that they were seeking to make them subservient to them through their false teachings. So, what was another consequence?

Paul's opponents devoured them. What does it say in **verse 20**? **“For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone [referring to his opponents] devours you.”** And how did they do that? It is probably referring to the material gain that they very much emphasized. They were like the Scribes and Pharisees who devoured widows' houses (**Luke 20:47**). So, what was another consequence?

Paul's opponents had taken advantage of them. What does it say in **verse 20**? **“For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone [referring to his opponents] takes advantage of you.”** And how did they do that? It probably meant they were seeking to take from the church whatever they needed to serve their own appetites very much like Paul had talked about in **Romans 16:18**. So, what was another consequence?

Paul's opponents had exalted themselves over them. What does it say in **verse 20**? **“For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone [referring to his opponents] exalts himself.”** And how did they do that? It probably meant that they were acting like dictators, lords, or executives. They viewed themselves as superior and wanted the people of the church, figuratively speaking, to wash their feet.

Paul's opponents had struck them. What does it say in **verse 20**? **“For if you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone [referring to his opponents] hits you in the face.”** And how did they do this? Most likely Paul's opponents literally slapped the Corinthians when they felt that they were out of line. Certainly this is not without precedent in the Scriptures. And certainly this last consequence of their continued tolerations of Paul's opponents really does bring home the abuse that Paul believed that these so-called “wise” Corinthians were suffering at the hands of those whom they in contrast to Paul had chosen to embrace.

So in light of how Paul viewed the relationship between these so-called “wise” Corinthians with his opponents in Corinth, and in light of all that he believed they were suffering in light of this relationship, what did he say next?

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 11:21**. **“To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.”**

So, what is Paul saying here? In a nutshell with biting irony this is what he is in effect saying, “If these are the characteristics of true apostles, then he must acknowledge that he and his associates were too weak to qualify.”

So, what did Paul hope to accomplish by this expression of biting irony? He hopes that these Corinthians, who had been so enamored by the so-called strength of these apostles as measured by the values of the world, would reveal the weakness of their claims and the sinfulness of their attitudes and actions while manifesting very clearly that his so-called weakness, which in fact was modeled after the meekness and gentleness of Christ, would soon begin to be viewed as the strength of his apostolic calling and character.

May we by God’s grace, as we bow in true humility before His throne, always be careful through our words and deeds to encourage others to do the same.