

Paul's Foolish Boasting
2 Corinthians 11:30-33
Part Three

If you are here this morning and consider yourself a true servant of Christ, then we must understand that we are not in this world to satisfy our fleshly whims but rather to carry out a mission that we have been given by Christ. And where do we find this mission detailed for us? We find it detailed for us in **Matthew 28:19-20**.

In these two verses Christ, speaking to His disciples, outlined for them their mission and the future mission of every other disciple. And what did He say? **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

This is our mission and this is what we are here to do, both individually and corporately. So hopefully everything that we are presently doing in our church or through our church, both individually as well as corporately, is in some way either directly or indirectly connected to this mission.

So, what should we expect as we corporately and individually press forward in this mission? Should we expect our lives to be easy? No! This is not what we should expect. This was not the way it was in Christ's life when He was sent into this world and it will not be that way in our lives as we go into the world. Therefore we must be prepared and thus willing to suffer deprivation, discomfort and perhaps even pain as we seek, as a servant and representative of Christ, to do the work that He has commissioned us to do as we go into this world.

Now some professing Christians might be turned off by prospect of suffering. But hopefully this will not be the case with us. For our willingness to suffer on behalf others as a representative of the crucified Christ will testify to ourselves as well as to others that we are true servants of Christ and not just pseudo servants. And hopefully this particular truth will continue come alive for us this morning as we now move on in our study of **2 Corinthians**. So where are we in respect to our study of this great epistle?

Paul in **2 Corinthians 10:12-18** had contrasted the improper boasting of his opponents with his own proper boasting. So, what made the boasting of his opponents improper and his boasting proper? The boasting of Paul's opponents was improper because their boasting focused on their credentials, accomplishments and experiences for the purpose of exalting themselves, whereas Paul's boasting focused on the gifts and the ministries that God had given him as an expression of His grace toward him for the purpose of exalting God rather than himself.

But after making this distinction Paul then went on in **2 Corinthians 11:1** to surprisingly, even shockingly, declare to the Corinthians his intent of doing something very similar to his opponents when it came to this matter of boasting.

So why would Paul do such a thing? It was because he believed that this expression of boasting that he intended to engage in, even though very painful for him, was what God wanted him to do in order to protect the Corinthians from the threat of his opponents whom he believed were false apostles and deceitful workers.

But even though Paul had a clear conscience in this matter he did not want to proceed without first of all defending his intention or willingness to engage in such boasting to the Corinthians, lest they would somehow misunderstand what he was about to do. And we saw this in **2 Corinthians 11:12-15** and a similar repeated defense in **2 Corinthians 11:16** through the first part of **2 Corinthians 11:21**.

He then and only then, after this lengthy and repented defense, choose to engage in the kind of boasting that he had earlier announced, a kind of boasting that in and of itself he considered to be pure foolishness.

And where do we find Paul in this epistle engaging in this kind of boasting? We find him in engaging in this kind of boasting in the latter half of **2 Corinthians 11:21** all the way through **2 Corinthians 12:13**, which brings us to the question that we are now in the process of answering.

So, what is that question? What did Paul's foolish boasting focus on in 2 Corinthians 11:21-12:13? So this is the question that we are now seeking to answer. And what was the first thing we saw that Paul focused on?

Paul's foolish boasting focused on his heritage (2 Corinthians 11:21-22). So where did we see this? We saw this in the latter half of **verse 21 & verse 22.** So now let me read those verses for you. And see if this is not so. **“But in whatever respect anyone else is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself. (22) Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”**

So in these verses do we find Paul foolishly boasting of his heritage? And I believe that the answer would have to be yes! Just as his opponents had boasted of their heritage Paul had now boasted of his. But unlike his opponents he did not do this in order to serve himself but rather he did this in order to serve the Corinthians, and this is important to understand.

So, what else did Paul's foolish boasting focus on? Paul's foolish boasting focused on his sufferings as a servant of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23-33). So where did we see Paul doing this? We saw Paul initially doing this in our study several weeks ago when we examined **2 Corinthians 11:23-29.**

Let me now read these verses for you and see if this is not so. **“Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. (24) Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. (25) Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. (26) I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; (27) I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (28) Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. (29) Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?”** So in these verses that we have just read, do we find Paul focusing on his sufferings as a servant of Christ? And what is the answer? The answer would have to be, absolutely! This is exactly what Paul is doing.

And why did Paul boast in this way? He boasted in this way because Paul believed that the mark of a true servant of Christ was the willingness to

suffer for those he was sent to reach as a representative of the crucified Christ.

Paul will now continue to drive this point home in **2 Corinthians 11:30-33** as Paul, in his ongoing foolish boasting, continues to focus on his sufferings

So, what is my hope for this message? My hope is that God would use this message to once again reinforce to us how our willingness to suffer on behalf of others, as a representative of the crucified Christ in the carrying out of the great commission, is a far better indicator that we are in fact a true servant of Christ than the fleshly standards of measure that are often applied to measuring those who represent themselves as servants of Christ or may be seen as servants of Christ. In other words, it does not matter how flashy we are, how charismatic we are, or powerful a speaker we are, how much Scripture we know, how many people are impressed with us and our clever anecdotes, or how insightful we might be or perceived to be. What really matters is that we are willing to suffer on behalf of others as a representative of Christ in carrying out the commission that He has given us.

So let us begin our examination of the passage we will be looking at this morning and we will begin with the first phrase of **2 Corinthians 11:30**, **“If I have to boast.”**

So, what is Paul communicating to us by this phrase, **“If I have to boast?”** Paul, once again, is communicating to the Corinthians in this phrase his inherent reluctance to engage in what he considered foolish boasting. But this was not all. He was not only communicating once again his reluctance to engage in what he considered foolish boasting, he was also once again communicating his willingness to do that very thing, believing that this was in fact what God wanted him to do in order to protect the Corinthians from his opponents.

So after having once again made clear to the Corinthians his reluctance as well his willingness to engage in foolish boasting by telling the Corinthians, **“If I have to boast,”** then what did Paul say? Paul then went on to say, **“I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.”**

So based on these words of Paul at the end of **verse 30**, if he had to boast, what was he going to boast in? Paul was very specific. If he had to boast he would boast of what pertained to his **“weakness.”**

So, what was Paul specifically referring to when he spoke of his **“weakness?”** What exactly was that?

Paul’s reference to his “weakness” referred to his sufferings on behalf of others as a representative of the crucified Christ (2 Corinthians 11:23-29, 32-33).

This should be apparent to us not only because of the detailed list of sufferings that Paul had just supplied to the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 11:23-29**, but also the very specific incident of suffering that he is about to supply in **2 Corinthians 11:32-33**.

So if Paul had to boast, what had he determined that he would boast in? If Paul had to boast he had determined that he would boast of what pertained to his “weakness,” or in other words to his sufferings on behalf of others as a representative of the crucified Christ.

This is what Paul had determined that he would boast in and this is exactly what we see Paul doing here in this chapter. We saw him doing this in **2 Corinthians 11:23-29** and we will see him doing this again here in this chapter in **2 Corinthians 11:32-33**.

This kind of boasting that focused on his weakness, or in other words his sufferings on behalf of others as a representative of the crucified Christ was very different than the boastings of his opponents who rather than boasting in their weakness, or in other words their sufferings on behalf of others as a representative of the crucified Christ boasted in their strength as measured by certain fleshly standards, which has little or nothing to do in marking out a true servant of Christ.

So let me ask you this question. How difficult would it have been for the Corinthians to actually get a grip on this; not only everything that he had said about all that he had suffered was true, but also that all he suffered was in and of itself a matter for boasting? It would have been very difficult for the Corinthians to get a grip on it, not only because of the extensive and

extreme nature of the sufferings that he had put forward to them, but also because the thought of someone actually thinking that their extreme suffering would have been a cause for boasting would have been totally foreign to them.

Therefore Paul used an oath in 2 Corinthians 11:31 to verify the details of what he had said about his sufferings as well as the importance he assigned to boasting of those sufferings.

So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 11:31** and see if this is not so. **“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”** So did Paul use an oath to verify the details of what he had said about his sufferings as well as the importance he assigned to boasting of those sufferings? Absolutely! This is exactly what he did when solemnly appealed to **“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ”** as a witness of his truthfulness.

Paul will now conclude this section that focused on his sufferings with one last boast and it involved his escape from Damascus shortly after his conversion. So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 11:32-33** and see if this is not so. **“In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, (33) and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.”** This story is course recorded for us in **Acts 9:8-25**.

So, what is Paul doing here in this verse? Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33, continued to focus on his sufferings, but this time rather than listing a specific suffering he chose to narrate an event that involved suffering (Acts 9:8-25).

“In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, (33) and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.” This event took place shortly after the conversion of Paul and is recorded for us by Luke in **Acts 9:8-25**.

So, what brought about this particular event? When the words in **2 Corinthians** are put together with the words of Luke in **Acts 9** it is apparent that this ethnarch had placed guards at the city gates in the hope that they

would be able to arrest Paul when he attempted to leave the city. Now why would he do such a thing? Paul had been preaching that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God in Jewish synagogues, and there were certain apparently influential Jews in the city that had been very upset with Paul, and it would appear that it was these Jews that caused this ethnarch to guard the city in order to seize Paul. So in order to avoid potential arrest Paul was lowered down in a large basket through a window in the city wall and escaped.

So why did Paul use this event to conclude this particular section of boasting that highlighted his suffering? It seems rather a particularly peculiar thing to do.

The most likely reason for Paul to use this particular event to conclude this section was because it was the initial and foundational example of his newly granted weakness as a servant of Christ. Or in other words, this event framed for Paul everything that was going to be happen to him in the years ahead as he in obedience sought as an apostle of Christ to take the gospel into the world.

So, what did Paul believe set him apart as a true servant of Christ? Was it flashiness, his charisma, his eloquence, his oratorical skills, his knowledge of the Scripture, how many people were impressed with him, or the many standing ovations that he got? This is what Paul believed. Paul believed that the mark of a true servant of Christ was the willingness to suffer for those he was sent to reach as a representative of the crucified Christ.

And this is why Paul, when he responded to his opponents boasts which were based on arbitrary and fleshly standards of measure to highlight the glitz and the glamour of their person and the power and success of their endeavors, chose rather to boast in his weakness, or in other words in his sufferings.

So are we a servant of Christ? Then I would encourage us, in consideration of this question, to honestly reflect on what we have been and are presently willing to suffer in order to fulfill the commission that Christ has given us to go into the world to make disciples and to baptize them and to teach to observe all that Christ has commanded us.

If we profess to be servants of Christ may we, by the grace of God, be willing to suffer in order to serve those to whom we have been sent so that we might through our willingness to suffer prove that we are in fact servants of Christ.