

**Paul's Foolish Boasting  
2 Corinthians 12:11-13  
Part Eight**

In our study of **2 Corinthians** and the section of Scripture that we have entitled “**Paul's foolish boasting**,” Paul, in attempting to protect the Corinthians from the improper boasting of his opponents, whom he considered to be false apostles, chose to engage in a very similar kind of boasting.

This is why we saw Paul boasting of his heritage in **2 Corinthians 11:21-22**. This is why we saw Paul boasting of his sufferings in **2 Corinthians 11:23-33**. And this is why we saw Paul boasting of his visions and revelations in **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**, where Paul speaking of his experience in the third heaven or in other words paradise told the Corinthians that he had heard and seen things that he was not permitted to speak. So, what then did Paul tell the Corinthians?

Paul, after having spoken to the Corinthians about the surpassing greatness of his revelations in **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**, then went on to explain how he in spite of the surpassing greatness of the revelations was able to remain humble. And he provided us this explanation in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**, which we completed last week.

We are now done with all of Paul's preliminary remarks on foolish boasting and will now consider his concluding thoughts in **2 Corinthians 12:11-13** concerning this particular topic. So now let me read these verses for you. “**I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. (12) The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. (13) For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive this wrong!**”

So, what is Paul doing in these verses as he records for the Corinthians his concluding thoughts on “foolish boasting?” This is what Paul is doing. Paul in these concluding verses is turning the tables on the Corinthians. So, what do I mean by this?

Paul prior to this conclusion had maintained a rather defensive mindset toward the Corinthians, as he explained to the Corinthians why he had chosen to engage in foolish boasting and the difficulty for himself personally in so doing, but now as he brings this section to a close, his defensive mindset toward the Corinthians will now change to an offensive mindset.

Paul, as he concludes his thoughts on foolish boasting in **2 Corinthians 12:11-13**, will now focus on how badly they had failed him and how their failure had by default put him in a position that he never should have been in, or in other words in a position where he felt that he had to defend himself and the authenticity of his apostleship to them by having to engage in what he considered to be foolish boasting, an activity that he found terribly distasteful.

And this was a tragedy, a tragedy that should never have been. And who was responsible for this? It wasn't Paul who was responsible. It was the Corinthians who were responsible. And Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:11-13**, as I already noted to you, as he moves from a defensive mindset to an offensive mindset toward them, will attempt to make this very clear to them.

And this now leads us to our question that we will be addressing this morning. And what is that question?

Based on the concluding thoughts of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:11-13, how did Paul highlight for the Corinthians the gravity of their failure toward him?  
This is the question that we will be asking this morning.

And what is my hope for this message as we seek to answer this question? This is my hope: that we might better appreciate our responsibility in both identifying and commending faithful servants of God and in doing so we might be used of God to help protect them and their ministry from unprofitable and destructive words as well as from false accusations. This is my hope for this message.

So now with this hope in mind let us once again go back to our question that we will be seeking to answer this morning. And again what is that question? Based on the concluding thoughts of Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:11-13**, how did Paul highlight for the Corinthians the gravity of their failure toward him?

First of all, Paul highlighted the gravity of the Corinthians' failure toward him by speaking to them about their failure to commend him even though he was commendable (2 Corinthians 12:11).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 12:11** and see if this is not so. **“I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles.”**

So now let me ask you this question in light of this verse. Did Paul believe that the Corinthians had failed to commend him even though he was commendable? Absolutely! He told them very specifically that he should have been commended, which implies what? It implies that he believed that even spite of their lack of commendation it didn't change the fact that he was commendable.

So now, hopefully in having established this point, let us now take a closer look at the verse so that we might learn as much as we can about what Paul is trying to communicate within this verse. And we will begin with the very first words. And what are those words? **“I have become foolish.”**

So, what did Paul mean when he said he had become **“foolish?”** When Paul said that he had become “foolish,” he meant that he had performed the actions of a fool when he boasted of his credentials and supernatural revelations. This is what he meant.

And was he proud of this? No, he was not proud of this. But even though he was not proud of this, he certainly did not see himself as ultimately responsible for these particular foolish actions.

Let us now continue to read the verse and see if this is not so? And what does it say? **“I have become foolish [or in other words I have performed the actions of a fool by choosing to engage in foolish boasting but then he goes on to say]; you yourselves compelled me.”**

So did Paul feel before God that he was ultimately responsible for his foolishness, for the foolishness of his boasting? No! He believed that the Corinthian church as a whole was ultimately responsible.

So how had the Corinthians pulled this off? Had the Corinthians begged Paul and pleaded with Paul to boast in this particular way, or in to other words had the Corinthians begged him and pleaded with him to boast of his heritage and his sufferings and of his revelations? No! They had not done this per se.

So how did they do it? The Corinthians compelled Paul to engage in foolish boasting because they had failed to commend him when he came under personal attack thus exposing the church to danger and therefore forcing Paul to do what he did. This is why Paul was able to say, **“I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me.”**

What a tragedy. When the opponents of Paul began to attack Paul in the Corinthian church, what should the members of the church have done? They, the members of that church, should have risen up in defense of Paul. And how should they have done this? They should have risen up in defense of Paul by commending him to his opponents as well as commending him to anyone else in the church who had begun to waver in respect to their commitment to Paul personally or to their commitment of Paul as their leader. This is what they should have done in light of these attacks upon Paul by his opponents.

But Paul was not done. He went on in this verse to tell them why they should have done this. And what was Paul’s reasoning for why they should have done this? Let us continue to read the verse. **“For in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.”**

So who were these **“most eminent apostles”** that Paul was referring to? Some people believe that he was referring to Christ’s actual apostles whom he had originally chosen and sent and who would become the foundation of the church. But in light of the fact that this specific group had at no point had been a point of this discussion in this epistle, it would appear that we would have to understand this group that Paul referred to in a totally different way. So who were these **“most eminent apostles”** that Paul was referring to?

When Paul referred to “the most eminent apostles,” he was referring sarcastically to that group of false apostles in Corinth who had been attacking him and seeking to undermine his apostleship. This is the group

that he was sarcastically referring when he spoke of the **“most eminent apostles.”**

So how had Paul highlighted to the Corinthians the gravity of their failure toward him? Paul first of all highlighted the gravity of the Corinthians' failure toward him by speaking to them about their failure to commend him, even though he was commendable. So how else did Paul highlight to the Corinthians the gravity of their failure toward him?

Paul highlighted the gravity of the Corinthians failure toward him by speaking of their failure to commend him even though he had performed the signs of a true apostle among them (2 Corinthians 2:12).

So let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 12:12** and see if this is not so. **“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”**

So, what was Paul referring to when he talked about **“the signs of a true apostle?”** The signs of a true apostle are the outpouring of the Spirit and its attendant circumstances, especially conversion and gifting of the believers (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:15; 15:1-15; 2 Corinthians 2:17-3:3). Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 2:17-3:3** and see if this is not so. **“For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. (3:1) Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? (2) You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; (3) being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”** This passage is reinforced by **1 Corinthians 1:18-2:15** and **1 Corinthians 15:1-11.**

So when it came to the matter of authenticating whether or not Paul was a true apostle, what were the signs of a true apostle that the Corinthians should have been looking for? First and foremost they should have been looking at their own lives to see if they, through the ministry of Paul, had experienced the outpouring of the Spirit and its attendant circumstances, especially their conversion and their gifting.

This interpretation I believe is reinforced when Paul tells the Corinthians that these signs, the signs of a true apostle, were performed among them **“with all perseverance.”** This reference **“with all perseverance”** would have been is a reference to his own ongoing and difficult ministry among the Corinthians that was blessed by God with the outpouring of the Spirit, resulting in their conversion and transformation in spite of his own personal weakness.

But this was not all. In addition to the outpouring of the Spirit and its attendant circumstances, especially of conversion and the gifting of believers, another accompanying sign of true apostleship was miraculous activity (2 Corinthians 12:12).

So let us now go back to the verse and see if this is not so. **“The signs of a true apostle** (or in other words the outpouring of the Spirit with all of its attendant circumstances especially the conversion and the gifting of believers) **were performed among you with all perseverance, by** [or perhaps better said, ‘with’] **signs and wonders and miracles.”** So was miraculous activity though secondary in this text another authenticating sign? Yes, it was. The miraculous activity described as “signs, wonders, and miracles” authenticated, or in other words certified that the perceived outpouring of the Spirit and its perceived attendant circumstances was in fact genuine.

Though this miraculous activity might have been a secondary apostolic sign in this text, it was a necessary and critical part of apostolic ministry (Acts 2:22; 4:30; 5:12; 16:18; 19:11-12; 28:3-6).

So how had Paul highlighted to the Corinthians the gravity of their failure toward him? Paul first of all highlighted the gravity of the Corinthians’ failure toward him by speaking to them about their failure to commend him, even though he was commendable. Then he highlighted the gravity of their failure toward him by speaking of their failure to commend him, even though he had performed the signs of a true apostle among them.

And finally, Paul highlighted to the Corinthians the gravity of their failure toward him by speaking to them about how they had failed to commend him, even though he had given them special consideration (2 Corinthians 12:13).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 12:13** and see if this is not so. **“For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!”**

So, what was Paul talking about here? His opponents had apparently been telling the Corinthians that he was treating them as inferiors by refusing to take money from them, while taking money from others. And why had he refused to make money an issue with them? Because he not only felt that the church was not yet in a position to practice grace giving, but probably more importantly he wanted to make sure that the covetous and greedy approach to ministry that his opponents had adopted was put on full display.

But in either case, the basic motivation of adopting his no-charge policy in not wanting to be a burden to them had not treated them as inferior but as special as an expression of his love and out of concern for them.

May God give us the grace to not only identify faithful ministers but to give us the courage to commend them if they come under attack, especially if those faithful ministers happen to be the elders of our church.