

2Cor. 11:1 ¶ Would to God ye could bear with me a little in *my* folly: and indeed bear with me.

This chapter starts off with Paul asking his readers for a little patience as he explains the need to defend his authority as an apostle. Unlike the false teachers who have impugned his reputation, his motives are for the benefit of the Corinthians believers—not to boast about himself. The Greek for “folly” makes reference to egotism. Paul doesn’t want to boast, but he feels the need to defend himself against the accusations being made against him.

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

2Cor. 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Paul clarifies the purpose for this section as his concern for the body of believers in Corinth. He loves them and is jealous for their spiritual welfare and the honor of Christ. Paul wants to present this body of believers to Christ as a clean, innocent and morally blameless (from the Greek for *chaste*) bride.

He uses Eve as an example of what he fears. The serpent was able to deceive Eve through cunning and trickery. He caused her to question what God had said. The false teachers that had come to Corinth were attempting the same type of attack—causing the believers to question the truth of God’s word as clearly taught them by Paul and trying to lure them into disobedience.

I like a quote from Tennyson that David Guzik used in reference to these false teachers: "A lie that is all of a lie can be met with and fought outright; But a lie that is partly the truth is a harder matter to fight."

Christ presented Himself clearly with wisdom and truth and without duplicity, and Paul had taught this body of believers in the same way.

2Cor. 11:4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*.

I am reminded that the first thing the Lord warned His disciples about in His last major teaching was to beware of deception that would include impostors claiming to be Christ and false prophets teaching heresy.

Matthew 24:4-5 & 11 “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many....And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.”

Those who preach “another Jesus” are distorting the truth as declared by Jesus concerning Himself in His ministry. To receive “another spirit” can only be a

reference to being seduced by evil spirits masquerading as “angels of light” according to the example of Satan as Paul explains later in this chapter.

“Another gospel” would include any salvation message that deviates from salvation as a gift of grace through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ on their behalf.

Paul is confident that the Corinthians had not been deceived as yet, but he was afraid that they were in danger of falling for someone who was charming and persuasive in his presentation of another Jesus through trickery of another spirit espousing another gospel (usually including works and to the profit of the false teacher).

The airwaves of America are saturated with just such false teachers utilizing the same methods-----and Christians are ever in need of the same warning that Paul is giving the Corinthians. We are so in need of discernment!

2Cor. 11:5 ¶ For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. 2Cor. 11:6 But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.

My first thought after reading verse 5 was that Paul was declaring himself on par in authority with even those apostles credited with the most authority in the church. Other commentators seem to think that Paul is using a bit of sarcasm in declaring himself more trustworthy than any of the false teachers that are trying to discredit him. I think both trains of thought are possible and are statements of truth, but I still lean toward my first instinct.

Paul admits that he is not known for using great oratory, but that in no way reflects on his knowledge of the truth. Truth be told, the most effective teachers are those that can convey the truth with simplicity and clarity. Very often it is proven true that those who speak with the most eloquent flowery language are covering up for the fact that they really don't know as much as people think they do.

Paul may not have been known for great oratorical skills, but his writing proves to this student of the word that he could have spoken in such a manner had he wanted. I believe he was more concerned with speaking the truth in simplicity and in the power of the Spirit. He was not concerned with making a reputation for himself; his desire was to honor God. I believe his words from 1Corinthians support this conclusion.

1 Corinthians 2:1–5 “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

2Cor. 11:7 Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?

I think the NLT expresses Paul's intent clearly: "Did I do wrong when I humbled myself and honored you by preaching God's Good News to you without expecting anything in return?"

2Cor. 11:8 I robbed other churches, taking wages of *them*, to do you service.
2Cor. 11:9 And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all *things* I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep *myself*.

Paul is not saying that he was a thief; he is just expressing the fact that he had accepted financial support from other churches that he used to support his ministry to the Corinthians. In fact, it seems that church leaders from Macedonia contributed as needed to meet Paul's needs during his time in Corinth. Paul had taken great pains not to present himself as one using his ministry to profit self in a culture that was so focused on wealth and status. Furthermore, he intends to continue his ministry with that safeguard.

Calvin worded it this way: "...he had of his own accord made a surrender of his own greatness, that they might become great through his abasement. For his design was, that he might promote their salvation."

I think it is important to note that Paul also worked as a tentmaker during his time of ministry in Corinth; he was not totally dependent upon support from the churches.

Acts 18:1-3 "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers."

Paul set a great example for the body of believers. One should never be ashamed of making an honest living by working with his hands. Though that work may not always be sufficient for the need, God will provide for the needs of His servants.

Matthew 6:25-33 "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in

all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

One of the things we have to guard against most today is discernment regarding our "needs" and our "wants."

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

2Cor. 11:11 Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.

2Cor. 11:12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

Why is Paul so intent to minister without the financial support of the Corinthians? Because he wanted to ensure that the people understood that he was presenting the truth to them in love; he was not using them for his own purposes and/or profit. His whole purpose was to present the gospel of Christ in a way that glorified God—not Paul. He was drawing a clear distinction between the way he ministered and the methods used by the false teachers.

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

2Cor. 11:14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

2Cor. 11:15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

In this section of verses Paul continues to emphasize the rationale behind his method of ministry. He is determined to serve the people in a way that distinctly separates him from how the false teachers operate. The false teachers try to deceive the people by presenting themselves as possessing like authority as the true apostles of Christ. Paul goes on to reason that is to be expected. Even Satan knows that his best chance of succeeding in his deception is to pretend to be serving in the name of the LORD. It is to be expected that those who follow Satan will imitate his style of ministry.

I thought this quote from Calvin to be quite telling: "It is a well known saying as to Babylon, that she gives poison to drink in a golden cup."

This section ends with a very subtle statement of the end result of the deceitful ministry of false teachers; it will be according to their works. They will not be able to find salvation in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

Paul addresses this point more directly in his letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 3:17–19 “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)”

2Cor. 11:16 ¶ I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little.

2Cor. 11:17 That which I speak, I speak *it* not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.

2Cor. 11:18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

After reading through several translations, it seems to me that Paul is asking the Corinthians to at least give him the same consideration they would give a “fool.” When I looked at the Greek for this word, the word “egotistic” jumped out at me. I think that is probably the intent since that seems to put him in the same category as the false teachers that are attacking him. In other words, Paul is asking the Corinthians to at least afford him the same attention they are affording the false teachers.

I think the following verses also support this understanding since Paul is declaring that he has much to boast about from a worldly perspective. He is careful to declare that he knows this boasting is not how the LORD would have him present himself.

2Cor. 11:19 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye *yourselves* are wise.

2Cor. 11:20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.

After looking at the Greek for “wise,” the word conceited jumped out at me. It seems that Paul is being pretty direct in identifying one of the weaknesses evident in this body of believers; they had quite a high opinion of themselves. It is an interesting human characteristic that those who are conceited are often drawn to others of the same ilk. In fact, they are easier prey for those who present themselves as even more important or conceited. It’s the old peer pressure scenario and the adolescent desire to be part of the “in crowd.” And we all know that these issues are rooted in a perception of appearances. That is how men like James Jones and Marshall Applewhite are able to get people to commit suicide.

As I was reading through this section again, I also couldn’t help but think of the abusive actions utilized by one of the recent darlings of Christendom, Todd Bentley. I just don’t understand how people can allow themselves to be deceived by such a person. As with the false teachers in Corinth, he evidently has the charisma to deceive people with an attitude of confidence and authority. (A Google search will list many revealing articles and videos about this man. One quite revealing video is posted at: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3869681612315798462#>.)

2Cor. 11:21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

The translations of this verse are a bit bewildering. They seem to indicate that Paul is apologizing for being too weak to utilize the same psychological ploys. I think it is more a statement of apology for showing too much forbearance in making quick accusation of these false teachers. In doing so, it had possibly made him appear weak in comparison.

2Cor. 11:22 ¶ Are they Hebrews? so *am* I. Are they Israelites? so *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so *am* I.

Now we come to the record of Paul's "boastings." First, he establishes his credentials from a Jewish perspective; those who are making false accusations against him are Jews. Paul's writings make it clear that he is proud of his Jewish heritage and burdened for his people.

Romans 10:1 "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

Romans 9:1-4 "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises...."

2Cor. 11:23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I *am* more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

Paul's accusers say that they are ministers of Christ, but Paul is confident that their lives do not testify to the validity of their claims. His testimony, however, consists of a long list of experiences that give evidence to his faith. In general, he has worked very hard in obedience to his commission. He has been beaten many times, imprisoned many times, and suffered to the point of death many times.

2Cor. 11:24 Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one.

2Cor. 11:25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

2Cor. 11:26 *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren;

2Cor. 11:27 *In* weariness and painfulness, *in* watchings often, *in* hunger and thirst, *in* fastings often, *in* cold and nakedness.

Now Paul gets a bit more specific.

- He had been beaten with 39 stripes by the Jewish leaders five different times.

- He had been beaten with rods three times.
- He had been stoned once.
- He had been shipwrecked three times.
- He had survived a night and day in the ocean.
- He had logged many miles of travel during his ministry.
- He had experienced danger from flooding, from encountering robbers, from angry Jews, from angry Gentiles, from angry city mobs, from exposure and hazards related to wilderness travel, from dangers encountered traveling on the seas, and from hypocrites claiming to be fellow believers.
- He had suffered much weariness, pain, loss of sleep, hunger and thirst and times of having no food at all, and lack of sufficient clothing and protection from the cold.

I couldn't help but wonder how many believers today would be able to give a similar testimony of faith and endurance if confronted with a similar series of trials and testing. Most importantly, could I?

2Cor. 11:28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

2Cor. 11:29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

Not only did Paul have to contend with physical trials and testing, he carried a continual burden of concern for the churches to which he ministered. Paul had invested of himself in these churches and is personally affected when he hears of their suffering or of their falling into sin.

I like the wording of the CJB for verse 29: "Who is weak without my sharing his weakness? Who falls into sin without my burning inside?"

2Cor. 11:30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

I think Paul is saying that rather than boast (from the Greek for *glory*) in what others might consider his accomplishments, he would rather boast of his weaknesses. In other words, he was aware that only "in Christ" could he do anything.

2 Corinthians 2:14 "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place."

2Cor. 11:31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

Paul is not speaking with a sense of false humility. He is just speaking the simple truth and can confidently call on God as his witness.

At this point he emphasizes that the God he serves is the Father of "our" Lord Jesus Christ. This is a strong statement of the authority of the Savior with the

strong implication that the Corinthians needed that reminder. It was God's word that carried authority, not the message of the false teachers that were making accusations against Paul.

2Cor. 11:32 In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:

2Cor. 11:33 And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

This chapter closes with an account of Paul's escape from Damascus to get away from the king's appointed governor who was determined to imprison him. I think he considered this an example of his weakness, since he chose to escape rather than face the governor. The faith of this new believer would grow exponentially with each persecution he faced.

I looked ahead to chapter 12, and I think he purposed to tell about this humbling experience depicting his weakness before relating his amazing heavenly experience in that chapter.