

2 Corinthians 11:16-33 – “Resisting or Resigned to Suffering?”

Ever had someone be a total jerk to you and you were trying so hard to keep calm; doing so well in restraining yourself, but then you were just pushed to the edge and you let the verbal onslaught go. I mean you kind of black out for a moment and when you're done you're not even sure what you said, but you hope it didn't bring any indictment against you.

This isn't quite Paul in our text here today, but he's getting close. He's dealing with some people that are not making life easy for him. He doesn't want to have to stoop to their level, but it seems to be the only way anyone will listen. But we'll notice that Paul doesn't try and defend how great he is, but rather, how great Jesus is.

11:16 - *I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.*

Paul did not like getting pulled into this tactic of having to promote himself. He calls it foolishness. For the believer, our goal is always to promote Christ. But because these false apostles were challenging Paul's authority and undermining the true gospel that he preached, Paul needs to call them on it and show his credentials and that he is a true apostle. In so doing he recognizes this is going to sound foolish, but he asks them to indulge his foolishness for a bit so he can deal with these guys on their level since it's the only way they seem to understand.

Again, Paul reiterates that this boasting in self does not accurately reflect Christ.

11:17-18 - *What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. ¹⁸ Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.*

Paul's not saying that this isn't inspired Scripture, but rather this does not go in line with what the Lord would want for His people. These false apostles were boasting in themselves and doing so falsely. It's easy to build yourself up, especially when you're not dealing with reality.

This is why Paul said in **2 Corinthians 10:17**, "*But "he who glories, let him glory in the Lord."*"

- These false apostles however are boasting in their accomplishments, boasting in who they are; they're boasting ***according to the flesh***.
- Paul reaches a point now in his letter where he figures he might as well play their game a little and see who comes out ahead. So, Paul is going to resort

to some foolishness and do some boasting. But as we'll see, his boasting is not to make something of himself, but rather to promote Jesus.

11:19-21 - *For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!*
²⁰ For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. ²¹ To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.

Paul once again uses some sarcasm here saying they are so wise. The Corinthian believers thought they were wise because they were moving along with these apostles that crept into the church. But they were really just putting up with foolishness.

Now who were those that they were putting up with? We have some hints here. It was those who brought them into ***bondage***.

Those who ***devoured*** them.

Those who ***took*** from them.

Those who were ***glorying in self***.

Those who ***abused*** them.

...if one brings you into bondage... This seems to be clearly speaking of the Judaizers who were a constant threat to the early church. They sought to bring followers of Christ back under the law. But to do so would be to rob them of the freedom and life they had in and through Jesus.

- **Galatians 2:4**, *"And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),"*
- **Galatians 5:1**, *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."*
- The enemy is constantly looking to bring believers under a religious spirit. One where you feel like you're doing all the right things but you're actually being brought under bondage because you're no longer relying on the simple grace that Jesus affords us. And when we move away from the simple message of 'saved by grace through faith', we've corrupted the gospel. It's bondage.

...if one devours you... These false apostles would come down hard on people and exercise an abusive authority. Sometimes this was through financially devouring them.

...if one takes from you... This is better understood as taking advantage of a person. They used their self-imposed spiritual authority to manipulate and dictate what others would do.

...if one exalts himself... It was the cultural norm in this day for a person to exalt themselves and boast in their own accomplishments. Again, this is not the way a true follower of Christ is to behave. The believer is to glory in the Lord, our boast should always center in what Jesus has done, not in what we've done.

...if one strikes you on the face... These false apostles saw it as no issue to actually get physical with their students. We read about Jesus and others being struck on the face by religious leaders.

The real shocker is that these Corinthian believers put up with these things. Perhaps they thought they were being brought into a higher spiritual level. But this is not the way of God.

- No one leaving church should be saying, *'What a wonderful service, that pastor sure took a strip off me. I feel 100 times worse than when I came.'*

Darby states: "It is amazing what people will suffer from what is false—very much more than they will endure from what is true."^{42 1}

Paul with a big scoop of irony, says: ***we were too weak for that!*** He was criticized for not being more authoritative and domineering, but this was not the way of Christ. It's not that Paul was too weak for behaving this way and treating others this hard, but Paul knew it was more of a blessing to walk in grace.

So having said all that, Paul now goes into his boasting, but even his boasting will be of a whole different nature.

⁴² J. N. Darby, *Notes on I and II Corinthians*, p. 236.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1861). Thomas Nelson.

11:22 - *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.*

These false apostles may have claimed to be of solid Jewish stock and thought they had an upper hand in things pertaining to the law, but Paul states that he too is a Jew through and through.

More so, he's a minister of Christ (vs. 23). Being a minister of Christ does not give you the right to lord it over others (1 Peter 5:2-3), rather it's a calling to serve others. The Greek word for **ministers** is *diakonos*, which means servant.

11:23 - *Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.*

Having to talk like this was a very difficult thing for Paul. He again reiterates that he's speaking foolishness. But it's the language that these false apostles seem to understand.

Now Paul lays out the real credentials that sets him apart as a minister of Christ. "Paul is not in fact magnifying self in the passage which is now beginning—in this, too, there is complete disparity between himself and his adversaries—but he is magnifying, as he does throughout this epistle, the amazing grace of God which in the midst of afflictions and sufferings is sufficient for his every need." ²

...in labors more abundant... Paul didn't just labor hard in the gospel travelling from place to place, he worked as a tent maker while in Corinth just so he could provide for himself while he shared the gospel there.

In Ephesus, during the siesta time, he taught in a rented school (Acts 19:9).

...in stripes above measure... Paul received multiple whippings that would have left the average man running home to mama.

...in prisons more frequently, in deaths often... Paul's going to expand on these things in the following verses. But in relaying these things, Paul is proving himself a true apostle. Despite all these difficulties, Paul knew that Jesus was worth it. These other guys would have high tailed it out of there at the slightest hint of suffering because they were only in it for themselves.

² Constable, Dr. Thomas L. <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/2corinthians.pdf> (quoting Hughes)

11:24-27 - *From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;²⁶ in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—*

“Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians fits into Luke's chronology of his life at Acts 20:2, so everything that Paul described here occurred before Acts 20:2. Paul's life involved many more dangerous experiences than we read about in Acts. Paul referred to many imprisonments (v. 23), but Acts only records one before this time (i.e., in Philippi, Acts 16:23-40).”³

40 stripes minus one was a Jewish punishment.

It was written in the law that you could only give 40 blows and no more (Deuteronomy 25:3). 40 is the number of judgment, 39 is the number of mercy.

- In order to not exceed what was written in the law, they would whip a person 39 times in case they had lost count and went one over.
- This beating would often bring a person to the point of death. Paul endured this 5 times!!

Beaten with rods was a Roman punishment.

Paul was ***stoned***, thankfully just once! You don't survive too many of those.

Traveling by ship in this day was a scary endeavor. You were sure you had some traveller's insurance on those trips. Paul was shipwrecked 3 times and once he was all night and all day ***in the deep***. I'm sure he was contemplating in that time, *'Do I really want to continue on this gospel ministry?'* Hanging out in the sea was probably like a vacation for Paul.

Some historians have said that there is no other man in the ancient world who's recorded to have travelled as much as Paul. And this wasn't easy travelling in this day. We complain about lack of leg room on the plane, or the food being a

³ Constable, Dr. Thomas L. <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/2corinthians.pdf>

little cold. Paul would have been like, *'You mean I can get from here to there in 2 hours which would normally take me 2 months? And they feed you too???' He wouldn't have been complaining about nothing!*

But traveling around to share the gospel brought countless dangers. You had to deal with shipwrecks, robbers on the roadways, people who were not welcoming of your message – or you!

Everywhere Paul turned there was a new danger ready to present itself.

- What keeps a man like this going in the face of such difficulty?
It was Paul's attitude. He had already laid down his life for the One that was truly worth living for!
- **Acts 20:24**, *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."*

Paul went through the gamut of suffering. He pretty much experienced every adversity. Yet, here he is, faithfully writing to the church at Corinth to continue on in the faith. Some people under Paul's experiences would have been writing, give it up, it's not worth it! It's too heavy, too hard, too dangerous. Just live for your own comfort.

But Paul knew that this life isn't supposed to be for our comfort. This life is to get us ready for the next one! It's meant to be lived with faith and trust in Jesus. We're to be dependent on Him. He's to be our strength.

How would you fare if God called you to a life like what Paul had to experience? Would you still be here on a Sunday singing praises to God?

Is your faithfulness to Jesus dependent on your circumstances? Is your view of God's love for you based on only good things that happen to you?

If so you may not have a true grasp of the gospel.

- Jesus didn't die on a cross to make your life pleasant in this world. He died to save you from the penalty of sin and to bring you in a right relationship with God. That standing with God is not determined by your circumstances. We live in a fallen world. Sin has messed everything up. But we've been saved from sin, and we're looking forward to the redeemed world to come. I'm not relying on everything being pleasant now, because I know Jesus has already secured that for me and one day I will see the fulfillment of that. That's why I don't need to be bothered by difficulties or hardships. It's all temporary, and our hope is in Jesus – what He's already done for us

internally in the present, and what He has prepared for us externally in the future.

Now back to Paul, you'd think he's listed off every possible trial he could. But then he says this...

11:28 - *besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.*

Besides the other things??? Can there be any other thing? But here Paul reveals what really was a burden for him – his care for the church. This amazes me! Because of all that he went through, it was this that really brought him to anguish. He wasn't just a hireling who was only serving himself, he was a true shepherd. He had a genuine heart for others and to see them grow in the Lord and continue in the faith.

11:29-31 - *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. ³¹ The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.*

Paul knew that the Lord doesn't need strong men, He needs people who are going to be dependent on Him. And it's through times of suffering that we learn all the more to be completely dependent on Jesus.

Romans 5:3–5, *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

Paul leaves us with one last example of this...

11:32-33 - *In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.*

This seems like an anti-climactic weakness to end on in comparison to all the other things Paul mentioned. But again, I believe it's so that Paul can let us see the most humiliating thing he probably had to suffer. I mean here's this intelligent man who's of sophistication, well trained, a Jewish blueblood, yet he had to

succumb to being lowered down in a basket. Helpless, so reliant on others, but more so, reliant on Jesus.

He could have asked, *Why Jesus? Why does this have to happen to me?* You've just called me to preach the gospel, why is this happening?

- There's times we can feel let down. We may question why the Lord does certain things. Why do we have to go through suffering, why aren't things more easy?
- But these are the things the Lord uses to do a greater work in us. A work that we don't always understand that we need until we've gone through it. Don't doubt the process, just know that God is bringing about good through it all.

We're going to see in Chapter 12 the good that Paul is going to experience. And how sometimes the Lord needs to lower us down so that we can get a more heavenly perspective!