

Introduction

There is an old saying that our lives are a lot like a tube of toothpaste. When we get squeezed, whatever is in us comes out. The quote is normally used in reference to finding out how people respond to difficult circumstances. Will a person respond to trials by trusting in God or by reacting in the flesh? The Apostle Paul has been squeezed by some people who are trying to discredit Paul and his ministry so that they can take control of the church in Corinth. This letter is his defense of himself and his apostolic ministry. While some people have not appreciated his reply, suggesting that it is boastful, most of us are very grateful for his response. We have his most personal letter, and we learn more about all the trials and afflictions that Paul endured during his apostolic ministry. We also gain understanding about some of the charges and attacks that were made against Paul. Paul was squeezed, and what came out is an incredible description of his ministry and credentials. In our passage today we will be looking at Paul's comparison to the most eminent apostles. We will look at a comparison of Paul with the false apostles who were trying to discredit him. Third, we will look at Paul's credentials. We will look at his ancestral background and how he suffered for the gospel.

Paul's Warning and Defense – Part 4

1. Paul's Comparison to the Other Apostles (2 Cor 11:5-12)
 - a. Knowledge (2 Cor 11:5-6)
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2. Paul's Comparison to False Apostles (2 Cor 11:10-21)
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(2 Co 11:5–12) “For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. {6} But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not *so* in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made *this* evident to you in all things. {7} Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? {8} I robbed other churches by taking wages *from them* to serve you; {9} and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.”

(2 Cor 11:10-21a) “As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. {11} Why? Because I do not love you? God knows *I do!* {12} But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. {13} For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. {14} No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. {15} Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. {16} 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. {17} 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. {19} 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*. **But** in whatever respect anyone *else* is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself.”

(2 Cor 11:21b-29) “To *my* shame I *must* say that we have been weak *by comparison*. **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. {23} 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?”

1. Paul's Comparison to the Other Apostles (2 Cor 11:5-12)

Paul makes a comparison of himself with the most eminent apostles. The KJV says the “very chiefest apostles.” The ESV translates this as “these super-apostles.” The Greek word is *lian* (Strong's G3029), which means exceeding or exceedingly great. No names are mentioned, but when I think of the chief apostles, I think of the three that were the leaders among the twelve apostles of the Lamb: Peter, James, and John. Jesus invested Himself into all the apostles, but He spent even more time with those three. When Jesus raised the synagogue official's daughter from the dead, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him except Peter, John, and James, and the girl's parents. When Jesus went up to the mountain to pray and was transfigured, He took along Peter, John, and James. They were in His inner circle. All of the apostles of the Lamb were super apostles, and by their hands many great miracles were performed. Paul makes a statement that he is not the least bit inferior to the most eminent apostles, which is quite a statement.

(2 Co 11:5) “For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.”

(Lk 8:51) “When He came to the house, He did not allow anyone to enter with Him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother.”

(Lk 9:28) “Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.”

In Peter's second letter, he encouraged the saints to be diligent to be found by Christ in peace, being spotless and blameless. Then, he wrote for us to regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as Paul had written, according to the wisdom given to him. Peter referred to Paul's letters, where he referred to those same things, and he equated Paul's letters to the rest of the Scriptures. Peter and the other apostles had great respect for Paul, and he was certainly not looked down upon as a lesser apostle.

(2 Pe 3:14–16) “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, {15} and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, {16} as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

a. **Knowledge** (2 Cor 11:5-6)

Among other things, Paul's accusers had spoken of his unskilled speech. Paul did not defend his speaking ability, but acknowledged it, saying, "But even if I am unskilled in speech..."

(2 Cor 11:6) "But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not *so* in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made *this* evident to you in all things."

God used Moses, and he was not eloquent in his speech. Moses told the Lord that he was slow of speech and slow of tongue. God told Moses that He was the one that made man's mouth and He would be with his mouth and teach him what to say. God is looking for willing servants that will allow Him to work in and through us. Paul was not skillful in speech, but God used him in mighty ways. Paul was willing to embrace the call that gave to him. Paul said that even though he was unskilled in speech, he was not in knowledge. Paul's knowledge had been made evident to the Corinthians.

(Ex 4:10–12) "Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." {11} The Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? {12} "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

In my first church plant, there was a man that accused me of not being anointed. In the late nineties, many people felt that if you did not prophesy, you were not anointed. This man said he saw anointing on Karen, but not in my life. This man was not alone; there were others. God did not call me to be a prophet, but to be a teacher. This has not deterred me from doing what God has called me to do. He has anointed me as a teacher of His Word. He has called me to plant churches and train leaders. So, I focus on doing the things God has called me to do. Each of us must do the things that God has called us to do with the gifts and abilities that He has given to us. He is the one that created each of us, and gave us our unique gifts, abilities, personalities, and callings. We need to be willing and faithful servants, and allow God to work through us.

In the class for drilling supervisors that my father developed and taught, many young engineers were sent by their companies to gain more understanding about drilling operations. The experienced drilling foremen, who also attended, understood the drilling operations, but they were weak in math. They had a difficult time with the calculations needed to analyze and solve drilling problems. The engineers were very good in math, but they lacked the experience that the drilling supervisors had. What was my father's counsel to these engineers and supervisors? He taught people to do what they are good at and get others to help you with the things that you are not good at. He told the engineers to learn from the experienced drilling foremen and for the drilling supervisors to get help from the engineers on all their calculations. He told people to focus on the things that they were good at, and get help from others that were strong in the areas that they were weak.

That is what Paul did. He focused on being a teacher and preacher, and to pass on the knowledge that God had given him. This does not mean that we should not work on our weaknesses. We should always seek to improve. However, we need to channel our energies into the things that God has uniquely gifted and called us to do. What are you good at? What are the areas that God has gifted you in? Many people wonder what God is calling them to do. There is a strong probability that God has called them to do the things that He has gifted them to do.

b. **Provision** (2 Cor 11:7-12)

Paul transitions from gifting to provision. He said, “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?” Paul is referring to the right to receive income for his labors. The eminent apostles, the super-apostles, all received income from the churches they were planting and leading. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul said that they had the same right as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas to take along a believing wife and to eat and drink. He asked, “Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it?” He quoted the Law, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” He said that God was not concerned about oxen, but had laid out a principle for His workers to be paid for their labor. Those who sow spiritual things should reap material things. Those who proclaim the gospel are directed by the Lord to get their living from the gospel. But Paul had not used this right. He had humbled himself and preached the gospel to the Corinthians without charge so that the Corinthians would be exalted.

(2 Cor 11:7) “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?”

(1 Cor 9:6–15) “Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? {7} Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? {8} I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? {9} For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? {10} Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*. {11} If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? {12} If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. {13} Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? {14} So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. {15} But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one.”

Paul continued by saying that he robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve the Corinthians. Paul did not rob other churches in the sense of committing a crime. He was receiving support and wages from other churches for work that he was not doing at their churches, so it was in that regard he was robbing them. He was taking wages but not doing work for them in exchange for the wages. The other churches knew that he was doing apostolic work, and they were happy to support his ministry.

(2 Cor 11:8) “I robbed other churches by taking wages *from them* to serve you;”

Paul did not place a burden on the church in Corinth while he was planting it. Even when he was in need, he said that he “was not a burden to anyone.” When the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied his needs, and in everything, he kept himself from being a burden to them. Paul is no longer at Corinth, but he said that he would continue on as before and not be a burden

to them. This was in sharp contrast to those that were attacking Paul and wanting to take control of the church in Corinth.

(2 Cor 11:9) “and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.”

2. Paul's Comparison to False Apostles (2 Cor 11:10-21)

These false apostles had different motives than Paul, so he said that he was going to continue doing what he was doing to cut off opportunities from them. There is nothing wrong with being paid for your labors in ministry; that was not the issue. Paul was using financial pressures to cut off the opportunities they had to get a foothold in the church. These attackers were boasting that they were apostles, like Paul, and they wanted to be regarded as such. Paul wanted to cut off their opportunities to do that.

(2 Cor 11:10-12) “As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. {11} Why? Because I do not love you? God knows *I do!* {12} But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”

Paul's boast about not being a burden to the Corinthians was not limited to Corinth and the regions of Achaia; this was the way that Paul conducted his ministry. There were churches that wanted to support his ministry, and they did support it. The preaching of the gospel, and the planting of churches in unreached areas was being done with the support of these outside sources.

Why did Paul not accept support from the Corinthians? Was it because he did not love them and want relationship with them? Paul answers emphatically that “God knows I do!” The reason that Paul did not receive from the Corinthians was to make full use of his right in the gospel. Paul loved the Corinthians, and his care, concern, prayers, and other actions clearly showed his love.

(1 Cor 9:16-18) “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. {17} For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. {18} What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.”

Paul turned his attention to his attackers, saying that they were false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. What is an apostle? The word apostle comes from the Greek word *apostolos* (Strong's G652), and it literally means one that is sent out or sent off. When Barnabas and Paul were called by God to be apostles, they were sent out by the Holy Spirit to do the work that God had called them to do. An apostle is someone that God has called to that office, and sent to do a specific work. In Paul's letters, he identified himself as an apostle, called by God. It is a calling, not something that we decide to do or become. These false apostles had a desire to be regarded as apostles, but they were not called by God.

(2 Cor 11:13) “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

(Ac 13:2–4) “While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” {3} Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. {4} So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”

The work of an apostle is extensive. Here is a brief overview of some of the things that apostles have been called to do:

- Preach the gospel (Luke 9:1-2, Rom 1:1)
- Plant and lay foundations in churches (Eph 2:19-22, 1 Cor 3:10-11)
- Equip the saints for the work of service (Eph 4:11-13)
- Train and raise up leaders in churches (Acts 14:23, Tit 1:5-8)
- Build up the body of Christ (2 Cor 10:8, 13:10)
- Bring correction for false doctrine or sin (2 Cor 13:10, Tit 1:10-11)
- Give oversight to the churches and leaders that they have raised up.

These false apostles were disguising themselves as apostles, but they were not called by God and were not doing the work of a true apostle. Paul said that even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, and it is no surprise for his servants to disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. These false apostles were giving the impression and appearance of being righteous and being apostles, but they were deceitful workers. He said their end will be according to their deeds. God knows all things and every person is going to stand before God and give account, and these false apostles will be judged according to their deeds.

(2 Cor 11:13-15) “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. {14} No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. {15} Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”

How did these false apostles give the appearance of being righteous? In Galatians, they came with a false gospel, saying that the Gentiles must be circumcised. It sounded righteous, but it was disturbing the believers, and bringing them under bondage. Paul said if anyone preaches a different gospel, he is to be accursed. Paul's letter to the Galatians was to keep them walking in freedom. In chapter five, he pleaded with them to stand firm in their freedom and not to be subject again to a yoke of slavery. He told them if they received a circumcision, Christ would be of no benefit to them.

(Ga 1:6–9) “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; {7} which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. {8} But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! {9} As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”

(Ga 5:1–2) “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. {2} Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.”

In Galatians 4, Paul gave some other examples of how these false apostles appeared to be righteous, but were bringing people into bondage. They were teaching the believers that they had to observe days and months and seasons and years, all of which pertained to keeping the Old Testament laws. These religious activities gave the appearance of righteousness, but Paul said they were weak and worthless elemental things.

(Ga 4:9–11) “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? {10} You observe days and months and seasons and years. {11} I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”

There were other false teachers, false prophets, and false apostles, and there were many false gospels and doctrines being promoted. In Colossians, Paul addressed the deity of Christ. Some were saying that Christ was not God, but Paul made it very clear that in Christ all the fullness of deity of God dwelt in bodily form. These false teachers, prophets, and apostles had wreaked havoc in the churches, and they came into the churches disguised as servants of righteousness.

(Col 2:8–9) “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. {9} For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,”

Paul asked the Corinthians to not think of being foolish because of his boasting, but if they receive him as foolish, then let him boast a little more. Paul said that many boast according to the flesh, and so Paul was also going to boast according to the flesh.

(2 Cor 11:16-18) “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. {17} 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.”

Sarcastically, Paul said that they, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. The Corinthians had tolerated those who were enslaving them. They were tolerating those who were devouring them. They were tolerating those who were taking advantage of them. They were tolerating those who were exalting themselves. They were tolerating those who were hitting them in the face. These false apostles were bringing the Corinthians into bondage to the law. These false apostles were taking advantage of them. These false apostles had put Paul down, and were exalting themselves. The Corinthians had not been wise and discerning; they had been deceived and taken advantage of, and Paul is trying to help them see what has been going on. Paul is not only defending his own character and ministry; he is trying to rescue them from these deceitful, false apostles, who were taking advantage of them. Paul is fighting and contending for their faith. These “wise” Corinthians were not even aware that they were being deceived and taken advantage of.

(2 Cor 11:19-20) “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.”

Using more sarcasm, Paul said, “To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.” Paul has not deceived them. Paul has not taken advantage of them. Paul did not take wages for his labors in Corinth. He worked hard to support himself and he also received wages from other churches so that he could offer the gospel to them without charge. Paul did not

enslave them, but helped them to be free from sin and the law. In comparison to what these false apostles did, Paul was weak. Of course, the exact opposite is true, and the use of sarcasm was to further impress upon them how foolish they have been to be deceived and taken advantage of.

(2 Cor 11:21) “To *my* shame I *must* say that we have been weak *by comparison*. **But** in whatever respect anyone *else* is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself.”

The false apostles had said that Paul was bold in his letters, but weak in person. Paul warned them, telling them that he was coming as a soldier, and the weapons of his warfare were not fleshly. He warned them that he was going to be very bold in his actions if necessary. Paul now asserts his boldness, saying, “but in whatever respect anyone else is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself. Paul was bold and he would prefer not to come and be bold in his actions when he comes, but he is prepared to do so.

(2 Co 10:10–11) “For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.” {11} Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons *we are* also in deed when present.”

3. **Paul's Credentials** (2 Cor 11:22-33)

Paul is now going to boast according to the flesh, and he starts with his ancestral credentials. Then, he will boast about how he has suffered for the gospel.

a. **Ancestral Credentials** (2 Cor 11:22)

The first point is whether he was a Hebrew. Scholars say that the reference to Hebrews means to the Jewish people ethnically and linguistically. Some Jews spoke Greek and were known as Hellenistic Jews. In Acts 6, the Hellenistic or Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the serving of food. Apparently, some of Paul's attackers had said that he was born in Tarsus, a Gentile city where Greek was spoken, and he was not really a Hebrew. Paul answers the question, “So am I.” Paul may have been born in Tarsus, but he was a Jew and he spoke Hebrew. Paul was educated under Gamaliel as a Pharisee, and would have memorized the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, all of which are in Hebrew. Paul was thoroughly trained in both Hebrew and Greek. All of his letters in the New Testament were written in Greek. He was an apostle to the Gentiles, and as such, he would have been speaking Greek the majority of the time. He was conversant in both Hebrew and Greek.

(2 Co 11:22) “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”

(Ac 6:1) “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.”

In Acts 21, Paul was being mobbed and the Roman soldiers brought him to the barracks. Paul asked the commander, “May I say something to you?” The commander was a little shocked because Paul had spoken to him in Greek, and he responded, “Do you now Greek?” After getting permission, Paul addressed the people in the Hebrew dialect. Paul was fluent in both languages.

(Ac 21:37–40) “As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek?... {40} When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,”

The second question Paul asks is, “Are they Israelites?” For the second time, he answers emphatically, “So am I.” The reference to being an Israelite or a descendant of Jacob (Israel) refers to the social and religious life of being a Jew. In Paul's letter to the Romans he said that he was an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul's attackers were not accurate in their accusations. Paul was a Hebrew and he was also an Israelite.

(2 Co 11:22) “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”

(Ro 11:1) “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”

The third question he asks is, “Are they descendants of Abraham?” God's covenant was with Abraham, and Paul is a descendant of Abraham, and he was also circumcised, which allowed him to serve as a Pharisee. The children of Abraham were the promised and favored people. Paul is affirming that he was also a descendant of Abraham. In no respect was Paul inferior to these false apostles who were trying to deceive, enslave, and take advantage of the Corinthians.

b. Suffering for the gospel (2 Cor 11:23-33)

Paul's fourth question is, “Are they servants of Christ?” His answer is different than the three previous questions. He said, “I speak as if insane.” The KJV translates it as, “I speak as a fool.” The ESV renders it as, “I am talking like a madman.” It is insane to compare Paul with these false apostles because they are not true servants of Christ; they are false apostles. They deceitful workers who are disguising themselves as servants of Christ. In regard to being a servant of Christ, Paul said, “I more so.” It was not just, “So am I,” but he is much more of a servant of Christ. Then, Paul shares how he has suffered as a servant of Christ.

(2 Co 11:23) “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.”

Paul said that he had been in far more labors. Paul has been working day and night for decades, and has been in far more labor. Second, Paul has been in far more imprisonments. Paul was put into prison in Macedonia, and that is where the jailer and his household were saved. Paul was imprisoned many times for preaching the gospel, and he would spend many more years imprisoned after the writing of this letter. We do not know the exact amount of time he spent in prison, but scholars believe it was five and a half to six years. While in prison, he wrote four letters that are known as the prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Third, Paul said that he was beaten times without number. We do not have a historical diary or record of all the times that he was beaten, but it was without number. Fourth, Paul said that he was often in danger of death. The Jews had tried to stone him to death. Everywhere Paul went, the Jews would follow him and try to stir up the crowds against him. He was often in danger of death.

Fifth, Paul said that he had received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. That was the maximum number of lashes that they were allowed to give. We do not have a picture of Paul's back, but he would have had scars all over his back from these brutal lashings. Sixth, Paul was beaten with rods six times. Seventh, Paul was stoned once, and that account is recorded in Acts 14:19. That occurred in Lystra, where Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and stirred up the crowds to stone him. They left him for dead, but when the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city, and kept right on preaching the gospel.

(2 Cor 11:24-25) "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."

(Ac 14:19–20) "But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. {20} But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe."

Eighth, Paul said that he was shipwrecked three times. The shipwreck in Acts 27 had not happened yet, so he ended up being in four shipwrecks. He said that he spent a night and a day in the deep.

Then, Paul boasts about the dangers that he has been through. He was in dangers from the frequent journeys, and he was constantly traveling. The roads were not safe to travel. If you recall the story of the good Samaritan, he was beaten and robbed on the road. It was a very realistic story. Paul was in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from countrymen, and dangers from Gentiles. He was in dangers in the city and dangers in the wilderness. He was in dangers on the sea and dangers among false brethren. Paul had been in labor and hardship, many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, and often without food, and in cold and exposure. Paul's boasting of his afflictions, labors and dangers could not have been matched by any of these false apostles. Were they servants of Christ? Paul was far more of a servant than any of them.

(2 Cor 11:26-27) "*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."

Aside from the external and physical things, there were internal pressures on Paul. He cared about the Corinthians. He had left an open door in Troas to go to Macedonia to find out how the saints in Corinth were faring. He cared about the saints in all the churches. There are two Greek words used for concern. The first is *merimna* (Strong's G3308), which means a care or carefulness. The intense concern is *pyroo*, which is where we get our English word *pyro*, which means fire. The KJV reads, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" There was this burning, passionate, zealous love and concern for the saints. This is what God wants every spiritual leader to have, a burning passion and care for the saints in the church.

(2 Cor 11:28-29) "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?"

Conclusion and Applications

Paul would have preferred not to boast, as he considered it foolishness. However, he had been attacked and he needed to defend himself and his ministry. Furthermore, he needed to contend for the faith of the Corinthian believers who were being deceived and taken advantage of.

Paul compared himself to the most eminent or super apostles and he was not in the least bit inferior to them, especially in knowledge. He may not have been an eloquent speaker, but he was very knowledgeable. He did not allow his weaknesses to keep him from ministering.

Paul was also not inferior in the area of provision. Paul conducted his ministry differently than most servants of Christ, and he preached the gospel without charge to the churches that he was planting. He worked day and night so that he would not be a burden to them. He also received support from other churches that he had already planted. The fact that he did not take wages from the Corinthians did not mean that he was less of an apostle.

Paul exposed the false apostles. They were disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, just as Satan had disguised himself as an angel of light. They were not servants of righteousness, but were false and deceitful workers. They were taking advantage of the Corinthians. They were taking them captive. They were deceiving them. They were exalting themselves. The Corinthians had tolerated this and allowed them into the church. Paul is exposing them, and he uses sarcasm to expose it.

Finally, Paul compared himself to these false apostles. He compared his ancestral credentials and how he had suffered as a servant of Christ. In no way was he inferior to them. He was a Hebrew. He was an Israelite. He was a descendent of Abraham. And finally, he was a true servant of Christ. He had gone through many hardships, afflictions, dangers, and pressures in his work as a servant of Christ.

None of us are strong in every area; we all have unique weaknesses and strengths. God wants us to effectively serve in the areas that He has gifted us. Like Moses or Paul, He can give us grace in our weak areas. What areas has God gifted you in? Are you using those gifts to serve the Lord? Are you self-conscious about your weak areas, and do they keep you from fully serving the Lord? Trust God to use you, and focus on the things that you have been gifted to do.

Paul did not allow weaknesses to keep him from ministry. He also did not allow hardships or afflictions to stop him. What are things that keep you back or hinder you from ministering? Ask God to make you courageous and strong so that you can persevere through the tough things that each of us must go through. He told Joshua to be strong and courageous and not to tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord was with him wherever he was going. He told King Asa to be strong and not to lose courage, for there was reward for his work. This morning, ask God for more strength, and courage so that you can persevere in the work of the Lord.

(Jos 1:9) "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

(2 Ch 15:7) "But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work."

Closing Prayer

Father God, we present ourselves to You this morning as living and holy sacrifices. We present ourselves to You as servants and kingdom workers. We present ourselves to You the way Isaiah did, "Lord, send me." Use us however you wish. Help us to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our toil is not in vain in the Lord. Help us to grow stronger in the gifts that you have given us, and help us to rely on You and others to help us in the weaker areas. Help us to suffer hardships as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. Help us to persevere as Your servants so that we can bear much fruit for You. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

(1 Co 15:58) "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in* vain in the Lord."

(2 Ti 2:3) "Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

Paul's Warning and Defense – Part 4 (2 Cor 11:5-29)

Introduction (2 Co 11:5–29)

1. **Paul's Comparison to the Other Apostles** (2 Cor 11:5-12, Lk 8:51, 9:28, 2 Pe 3:14-16)
 - a. **Knowledge** (2 Cor 11:5-6, Ex 4:10–12)

 - b. **Provision** (2 Cor 11:7-12, 1 Co 9:6–15)

2. **Paul's Comparison to False Apostles** (2 Cor 11:10-21, 1 Cor 9:16-18, Ac 13:2-4, Luke 9:1-2, Rom 1:1, Eph 2:19-22, 1 Cor 3:10-11, Eph 4:11-13, Acts 14:23, Tit 1:5-8, 2 Cor 10:8, 13:10, 2 Cor 13:10, Tit 1:10-11, Ga 1:6-9, 5:1–2, 4:9-11, Col 2:8-9, 2 Co 10:10–11)

3. **Paul's Credentials** (2 Cor 11:22-33)
 - a. **Ancestral Credentials** (2 Cor 11:22, Ac 6:1, 21:37-40, Ro 11:1)

 - b. **Suffering for the gospel** (2 Cor 11:23-29, Ac 14:19-20)

Conclusion and Applications (Jos 1:9, 2 Ch 15:7, 1 Cor 15:58, 2 Ti 2:3)