

BRAGGING LIKE A FOOL

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Once in a while I discover that someone I think I've known well for years has secrets he's never told me about.

These secrets aren't the "deep, dark" kind that we'd rather not know.

We may discover that they've done heroic acts
—usually either in WW II, or in Vietnam.

A number of WW II heroes I've known never talked about what they went through in that conflict.

Some years ago I found out that one of my best friends was nearly killed as an aircraft gunner in Vietnam.

These guys never talked about what they went through.

Either they can't stand to remember it;

or they just don't want to draw attention to themselves.

In either case, they have plenty they *could* brag about, if they wished.

But they weren't talking.

Paul is forced into letting us in on some of those "flashbacks" from his life in 2 Cor. 11:16-33. He tells us some things he'd rather not talk about.

VINDICATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 10-13

RESPONSE TO THE CRITICS—to those who are putting him down **10-12:18**

Exhortation not to judge by human standards
10:1-6

Importance of divine approval 10:12-18

What really matters is what *God* thinks about Paul's ministry, not what *man* thinks—not even what we think about ourselves!

Fear of impact of the false teachers 11:1-6

While Paul isn't concerned about a human evaluation of his ministry, he is concerned that because of such popular

misconceptions, *his* message might be rejected, while *the false teachers'* message might be accepted.

SUFFERING ON ACCOUNT OF THE GOSPEL

11:16-12:11

Paul has adequate basis to brag about himself, if that's what they want to hear.

This isn't the kind of message Paul likes to give.

He doesn't enjoy bragging about himself.

BUT—the circumstances force him into it.

They established policy of following leaders with biggest promotion campaign!

They're back to operating by the world's standards.

God doesn't operate by those standards.

God doesn't consider outward appearance and promotional campaigns to evaluate His servants.

But, to protect them, Paul is going to speak the language they're used to:

COMPARISON WITH JUDAIZERS 11:16-33

Paul introduces his comparison, affirming how distasteful this approach is to him.

IT'S FOOLISH TO BRAG ABOUT YOURSELF 11:16-18

Paul doesn't want to join in their foolishness.

11:16 *"Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little."*

Throughout Paul's defense of his ministry, he affirms:

Bragging about yourself is foolish. 10-11:15.

Yet we're used to putting up with such foolishness.

"Don't consider me to be one of the foolish ones." 16a

"I don't want any part of that kind of thinking!"

"But even so, receive me, though it be as a foolish person."

16b

Paul is going to imitate the style of the foolish.

This isn't just "sour grapes."

He isn't protesting because he has nothing to brag about.
His credentials are as good as any.

Paul *COULD* outboast them all, if he chose to argue that way.

Even so, he doesn't want to join in this foolish way of thinking.

**God isn't impressed with our bragging
about our accomplishments. 11:17a**

This isn't God's perspective.

God doesn't talk this way.

God's evaluation isn't based on our performance.

**Trusting in our accomplishments is foolishness.
11:17b**

This is the perspective of the foolish—of putting your confidence in boasting.

This is the danger of performing to receive praise
—of believing your own press clippings!

Hendricks: "Remember that flattery is like perfume.

You smell it; you don't swallow it!"

Paul is obligated to join in their foolishness. 11:18

"Since you're persuaded by their boasting (and led astray by it),
For your sake, let me give you something to compare it to."

Since they're led astray by the "great accomplishments" the boasters are flaunting in front of them, Paul has to respond in kind.

It's not the kind of talk they should be listening to, . . .

It's not the kind of talk he wants to be known for, . . .

But, at the moment, it's the kind of talk they're used to and expect. So, for their sake, he'll join in for a moment.

FOLLOWING THE FOOLISH LEADS TO SLAVISH SERVICE 11:19-21a

Paul is obligated to join the foolishness because . . .

We willingly follow the foolish 19

“You gladly put up with those who engage in such foolishness, since you are so ‘wise.’”

This is what your kind of “wisdom” leads to!

You’re so “smart” that you actually go along with this stuff!

These “super-apostles” must have been pretty impressive!

Paul then gives the details of what they put up with

–how such leaders treat their people **20**

“You’re so brilliant that you put up with fools while they exploit you!”

[When we follow such people, . . .]

We willingly put up with people who mistreat us.

The pattern among the foolish leaders they follow:

The list reminds me of the way cultic leaders today demand submission from their followers—they put up with *anything!*

Satan’s messengers, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, in order to *enslave* their followers, and ultimately *destroy* them!

When our success depends on our accomplishments, we will stomp on the competition.

–*We’ll go after anyone who gets in our way.*

I’ve heard leaders say,

“We have to show people that we’re ‘*The Lord’s anointed!*’”

“We’re appointed by God to tell people what to do!”

That’s what the flesh produces—

Our efforts don’t lead to God’s glory, they lead us to stomp out the “opposition!”

Paul isn’t willing to imitate their foolish leadership style. **21a**

What does he mean by this?

“Weak” ought to be in quotation marks!

In comparison to the impressive “super-apostles,”

Paul must have seemed pretty weak.

“If you’re prone to follow leaders who abuse you, . . .

“If that makes you value their teaching, . . .

. . . I’m not willing to join that club!

. . . Maybe I’d be more persuasive if I’d treat you that way!

. . . BUT, I’m not going to do it!

The fact he’s not that kind of leader may earn less respect from the crowd,

He may look weak, and may be embarrassed because of his “weakness.”

But he’s still not going there!

Some people are naturally inclined to respond to abusive authority.

Example: **Addicted to Misery**—we think we deserve to suffer!

People might follow Paul more readily if he were “stronger” that way.

But Paul isn’t willing to lead them that way.

Godly leadership may seem weak and unimpressive, in comparison to the world’s dynamic leadership style.

But notice the difference in its fruit!

GODLY LEADERSHIP IS SUPERIOR TO FOOLISH LEADERSHIP 21b-29

Paul compares religious heritage with the foolish boasters.

*“Though I hate this foolish approach,
let me tell you about my religious heritage.”*

21b-23a

His credentials hold up alongside of anyone!

By culture, by religion, by family heritage, by service to Christ, **he has it all!**

The “super-apostles” could never compete with his credentials!

These are all GOOD things!

They're things God established that are a basis for blessing.
But they're NOT things to boast about.

They're not things that ought to make him proud
—or make him feel superior to others.

That response contradicts the **gospel of grace** he preaches.

Paul compares service for Christ with the foolish boasters. 23b-33

Don Carson: [Those who evaluate based on performance would be expecting Paul to present a list of accomplishments:] “I’ve established more churches; I’ve preached in more lands and to more ethnic groups; I’ve traveled more miles; I’ve won more converts; I’ve written more books; I’ve raised more money; ... I’ve seen more visions; I’ve commanded the greatest crowds and performed the most spectacular miracles.”

[We could add: “I’ve built the biggest church, or school, or hospital; I receive the greatest honorariums; I live the good life in a great mansion.

God knows that I deserve it, for my faithful service!”]

**Rather than prestige, power, and possessions,
God’s true servants are distinguished by suffering.**

Paul considers it **God’s seal of approval**

to permit him to **SUFFER** for Jesus’ sake.

He joins the apostles in **Acts 5:41**. They **rejoice** “because they’re counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Paul can stand up to any of God's servants in that area!

He lists the sufferings he has endured for Christ.

When we consider all the affliction Paul endures, we realize how little we understand about what it means to suffer for Jesus!

Just the “**39 lashes**” would leave a person nearly dead.

He suffered that treatment *FIVE TIMES!*

Among his sufferings is anguish caused by **concern for the churches.**

When people in the churches suffer, he suffers with them.

When they fall into sin, he struggles on their behalf.

Paul describes the anguish back in ch. 7, when he anxiously awaited Titus’ return from visiting them:

“Fighting without; fears within”

When he sees a brother fall, it “burns” with pain inside him!

Only those who’ve participated in ministry understand what that’s like!

The greatest joy of ministry is seeing people’s lives changed by the truth of God’s Word.

The greatest affliction comes when people make wrong choices; when they refuse to follow what God has said.

Corinth certainly had more than its fair share of causing that pain!

His **final episode** illustrates how he’s gone about as low as you can go.

With an oath before the Lord, he affirms that he’s telling the truth.

He previously entered Damascus as a proud Pharisee, respected by political leaders,

pursuing Christians with the government’s blessing,

Now he enters Damascus as the great “Apostle to the Gentiles”

He may be expecting a rousing response, an opportunity to present the gospel to crowds of people.

Instead, he's pursued by local police, and has to escape as a lowly criminal, sneaking out of town, hiding from those who pursue him, in a smelly basket that probably usually carried dead fish

(About as low as a proud Pharisee could go!)

WE travel to a community to speak; they put us up in first-class hotels

Paul leaves town scrunched up in the bottom of a basket. How embarrassing for a famous preacher!

The bottom line for Paul:

Success is *NOT* based on our performance and accomplishments.

Success is based on our weakness. 11:30

"If I have to boast, I'll boast about things that show how weak I am."

Why would anyone point to that? 12:9

Paul's answer: *"I'm glad to boast about **my weaknesses** So that Christ's power may reside in me."*

It isn't about US and our performance.

It's about God's power residing in us.

He wants God's power to be evident in his life--

That happens best in our weakness,
NOT in the things we boast about

To boast about our accomplishments is foolish.

It reflects an attitude of dependence on our performance.

We ALWAYS come up short on that scale--unless we just compare ourselves to our friends, like they were doing!

We ought to join Paul in avoiding the temptation to brag about our education and training, our success and our bank accounts, our homes and our honors, as if that's the basis of our value.

In a tragedy, an earthquake or a tornado, a fire or a terminal illness, those things quickly become meaningless!

To boast about our weakness is wise.

That reflects an attitude of dependence on God's work in us.

When God does HIS work in our lives, it comes out good.

HE gets the glory!

Which course would we rather pursue?

IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR LIFE:

1. **Boasting about our abilities and accomplishments, about our success, as if we're the ones who pull it off, ultimately leads to frustration and defeat.**

We'll never be great enough to measure up to God's standard!

2. **Acknowledging our weakness leads to acknowledging God's greatness, so that He gets the glory HE alone deserves.**

3. **Imitating our culture's standards of performance and success interferes with pursuing Jesus' values for His disciples.**

Henry Lyte, in 19th century, penned words that keep our **perspective in balance**:

Jesus, I my cross have taken,

All to leave and follow thee;

Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,

Thou, from hence, my all shall be;

Perish ev'ry fond ambition,

All I've sought, and hoped, and known;

Yet how rich is my condition,

God and heav'n are still my own.