

**BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS
PAUL'S RELUCTANT RANT
2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-29**

Introduction

We see here that Paul compares himself with those who are his critics. He does so in three ways:

First, in verses 16-21a, Paul compares authentic apostles with the false apostles in the way they treat those under their authority. In this comparison, the authentic apostles fall far short of the authoritarian, high-handed tactics of their adversaries.

Second, in verses 21b-22, Paul compares himself with those who take pride in their Jewishness. In this comparison, Paul comes out their equal.

Finally, in verses 23-29, Paul compares his service with that of his opponents in terms of the price he has paid to minister to others. Here, Paul leaves his opponents in the dust. They cannot even begin to compare themselves by his standard of personal sacrifice.

We find here a most revealing comparison, one that Paul does not want to make. I believe he does so because of Solomon's admonition:
Proverbs 26:4 Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

**I. WE SEE PAUL'S RELUCTANCE! (11:16-19)
Understand that Paul didn't really want to boast about himself, but his Corinthian adversaries had forced him to this point.**

For a number of the Corinthians, boasting came easy. But for Paul, ONLY his boasting of and in Christ is easy.

But here we see that Paul finds himself having to boast about himself, and he readily admitted that it was something he did not like it!

Boasting about himself was NOT something that came naturally to the Apostle Paul.

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Nevertheless, in this instance, he saw it as a necessity in order to show the folly or foolishness of the false teachers who continually boasted about themselves.

So, reluctantly, Paul engages in self boasting by comparing himself and his colleagues with these false apostles.

And when he makes this comparison, the false apostles came out looking very bad.

The first three verses we just read are Paul's effort to persuade the readers that he knows that what he is doing is foolish, and that he really regrets having to employ the method that he uses here.

He simply asked the Corinthians to show him the same tolerance that they had shown the false apostles. These false teachers foolishness was tolerated well, and so Paul hoped the Corinthians would tolerate his "foolishness" too.

II. WE SEE PAUL'S FIRST COMPARISON! (11:20-21a)
When it came to their use (or rather abuse) of authority, Paul and the other authentic apostles simply could not hold a candle to the false apostles!

These folks led the same way the Gentiles did and in the way Jesus forbade His disciples to do. **(Look at Matthew 20:25-28)**

The Apostle Peter also acknowledged this kind of servant leadership in His first epistle.

1 Peter 5:2-3—“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”

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These false teachers loved power and they loved pushing people around! They believed that an assertive and authoritarian leadership style was needed! They judged others on the basis of appearances and they both spoke and led in a high-handed manner, as though this clearly established their superiority over others.

This kind of harshness is unfortunately still found in some Churches today.

These Corinthians failed to discern the most profound distinctions between the lordly authority of the false teachers and the self-sacrificing devotion and Spirit-entrusted authority of the apostle! And they foolishly chose the false teachers as their leaders and models.

Paul didn't even want to be compared with these power-hungry exploiters. In a bit of sarcasm, he admits that he and his fellow ministers were too weak for that kind of leadership!

III. WE SEE PAUL'S SECOND COMPARISON! (11:21b-22)

The exact shape of the false message these false apostles and teachers preached can only be inferred from what Paul says and apparently it was a form of Judaizing.

What we do know is that these false apostles made much of their Jewish heritage (vs 22), and to this they possibly added some other things that they felt made them superior Christians!

Paul acknowledged to the Roman Church that there were certain advantages and privileges associated with being a Jew.

But as far as position in Christ, Galatians 3:28 comes into play: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

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Being a Jew does not make anyone better than anyone else. At times, some of the Jews forgot or willfully denied this. (Exp. Romans 1-3 regarding sinners)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the great equalizer of men! All men are equally dead in their transgressions and sins, and thus equally deserving of God's eternal wrath. All those "in Christ" by faith are equally saved.

The Judaizers did not like this equality and sought through various means to revise the Gospel to accommodate their arrogance.

They resisted the evangelization of Gentiles (Acts 10-11, 22:22) and insisted that those Gentiles who came to faith in Christ had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15).

They had a smug sense of superiority to the Gentiles that was evident in both their actions and words. Paul branded that here and elsewhere as heresy!

In Philippians 3, Paul reminds us that he himself once boasted that he was a Jew's Jew.

Philippians 3:4-6 4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Did some of the false apostles in Corinth take pride in their Jewish origins? Did they think it made them first-class citizens in the kingdom of God, while Gentiles were second-class? Did they want to be regarded the same as Paul? If so, then they need to remember what Paul said about his heritage.

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Philippians 3:7-9 7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Those things in which the Corinthian Jews seemed to boast, Paul had equal grounds to boast. But when Paul was marvelously saved by the grace of God, he came to see his Jewish heritage in its proper perspective.

He saw that being a Jew is a privilege which brought great responsibility, but it in no way was intended to elevate Jews above Gentiles or Gentiles above Jews.

If some Corinthian Jews thought their Jewishness made them superior to Gentile saints, they were the fools for thinking that way.

III. WE SEE PAUL'S THIRD COMPARISON. (11:23-29)

Paul reluctantly plays the fool here by comparing himself (and his fellow authentic apostles) with the false apostles.

The first leg of the race really made Paul look "bad." He and his colleagues cannot even begin to compare with the false apostles in terms of the way they are able to push people around and get away with it.

The second leg of the race was an even match. Paul was able to hold his own when it came to his Jewish credentials.

And now, here in the third and final leg of the race, we see that Paul left his opponents behind, as if they are standing still.

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The basis for Paul's comparison in this third leg of the contest is that of **servanthood and suffering**. Paul gives his readers a most impressive list of his sufferings for the sake of the gospel.

Time does not permit us to explore every instance of suffering Paul enumerates for us. We saw the details of some of these when we studied the book of Acts.

Frankly, there is nothing much one could add to what Paul says. Every one of his afflictions is clear and easy to understand. While we may not know exactly when, where, or how these happened in Paul's life, we do find it rather easy to believe that they did. Some things to note:

1. All Of The Items Paul Lists Here Are Examples Of His Personal Sacrifices And Sufferings While Proclaiming And Advancing The Gospel Of Jesus Christ!

These are not the kind of things his adversaries would have boasted in. They boasted of their successes, not sufferings!

The things Paul's adversaries considered shameful and discrediting are the very things for which Paul boasted! Here is where Paul really made his point.

His opponents were into the "good life." They were self-indulgent, and they offered the same lifestyle to those who would follow them. (Sound familiar? e.g. TV hacks)

Paul and his colleagues were selfless and were paying a very high price for the privilege of proclaiming Christ.

2. The Afflictions Paul Lists Here Were Those He Could Rather Easily Have Avoided Had He Chosen To Do So!

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Paul's sufferings and trials were those he received for preaching the Gospel. If Paul had chosen to just back off and play it safe, he would not have suffered as he did.

Paul lived the kind of life and engaged in the kind of ministry which he knew would bring him adversity. This was made clear to Paul at the very outset, at the time of his conversion:

(Remember the words of the Lord to the Damascus disciple Ananias regarding Saul who became the Apostle Paul?)
Acts 9:15-16 15 *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: 16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

3. This List Of Paul's Sufferings For The Sake Of The Gospel Is Much More Extensive Than Those Recorded In The Book Of Acts!

The Book of Acts does detail some of these same sufferings and hardships that Paul personally endured. But a great number of the afflictions he mentions here are not mentioned elsewhere.

This is by far the most detailed account of Paul's sufferings that we find in the Scriptures. If we thought of Paul as a great sufferer for Christ because of what we saw when we studied the Book of Acts, recognize that Paul suffered far more than Luke tells us in Acts!

4. The Sufferings And Sacrifices Paul Details Here Encompass The Whole Spectrum Of Suffering And Hardship!

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Paul includes hard work (labors), at least two forms of beating, imprisonments, dangerous situations, exposure to the elements, and deprivations (of food, shelter, sleep).

In addition to these afflictions of the body, there are the mental and spiritual burdens he bears for the saints. He personally identifies with the weaknesses and sins of the saints who are in all the churches.

5. The Sufferings That Paul Details Are Those Every Christian Should Expect, Although We May Experience Them To A Lesser Degree.

Paul tells those to whom he preaches the Gospel that suffering is a part of the Christian life, and that they should expect it.

Suffering is not an anomaly; it is something every Christian should expect. Peace and prosperity are the anomaly.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

6. Suffering And Adversity Are An Expected Part Of This Life And Also A Part Of The Process Of Our Sanctification And Conformity To The Image Of Christ!

Acts 14:21-22 21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

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7. In Spite Of The Intensity Of The Sufferings Of Paul, He Considered Them To Be Both Light And Temporary !

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

8. Paul Actually Rejoices In His Sufferings, Because These Are Evidences Of His Identification With Christ, And A Means By Which He Came To Know Christ More Intimately!

Philippians 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

(See Colossians 1:24-29)