

THE MINISTER: HIS BOAST AND COSTLY LABOURS

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16–33

Introduction

Should a minister or any other believer ever boast of who he is or what he has done? This passage discusses the subject.

- I. The minister appeals to be received and heard (vv. 16-21).
- II. The minister stands equal in heritage (v. 22).
- III. The minister must be more than a minister (vv. 23-31).
- IV. The minister is not guilty of cowardice; he was only escaping death (vv. 32-33).

I. 2 Corinthians 11:16–21 Minister's Defence: Boasting

The minister appeals to be received and heard. The minister, Paul, was being attacked by some false teachers and critics in the Corinthian church. They were claiming that Paul and his gospel had no place in the church, that his authority and ministry should be rejected. They were either claiming or thinking...

- that they were the true ministers and he was the false minister.
- that their ideas were right and his ideas were wrong.
- that they had the true authority of God, and he was acting in his own authority.
- that their charisma and speaking ability and his poor appearance and lack of oratory were proof that they were the ones to be followed (cp. 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor. 2:1. See note, 2 Cor. 1:12.)

Paul was forced to defend his ministry and authority as a minister of God. If he failed to defend himself, his critics would interpret his silence as weakness. They would begin to spread the rumour that his silence was proof that he was not called of God, for he did not consider his ministry worth defending.

However, there was another reason for Paul defending his ministry: to save the Corinthian church from the false leaders and teachers. The outline of these six verses shows how Paul appealed to the Corinthians to *receive him and to hear him*.

1. He needed to boast a little. Only a “fool” boasts in himself, and Paul hesitated to defend himself by boasting in his call and ministry. But it was the only way to defend himself against these critics. Therefore, he appealed to the church to receive him as a fool and allow him to do a foolish thing: to boast in his ministry for a few moments (v. 16).
 2. However, his boasting was not the way the Lord talked. The Lord did not go about boasting in His ministry. But he, Paul, was confident that his boasting was the thing
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that had to be done in order to defend himself against his critics and to save the church from the false teachers (v. 17).

3. This is the crucial point: Paul will boast in his ministry because the critics and false teachers are *boasting and talking big* about who they are and what they have done (v. 18).
4. The church was gladly receiving such “fools,” and in receiving them the church felt it was wiser than others. Therefore, the church ought to receive Paul and let him play the fool (v. 19).
5. The church was receiving people...
 - who enslaved believers
 - who devoured and took money from believers
 - who preyed upon believers
 - who exalted and lorded themselves over believers
 - who slapped, that is, humiliated believers

Therefore, the church ought to bear with Paul who planned no harm whatsoever to the believers of the church (v. 20).

6. The need now was for the minister to be strong in boasting. Paul was ashamed that he had appeared to be weak in the past. But now, he would be bold and speak as foolishly and boastfully as the critics and false teachers (v. 21). He would defend his ministry and be bold in his defence.

II. *2 Corinthians 11:22 Paul's Claim of Equal Heritage*

The minister is to stand equal in having a godly heritage. It is interesting that the false teachers and critics in Corinth were apparently Jewish converts.

1. The false teachers claimed to be Hebrews; that is, they were so loyal to God that they had kept up the Hebrew language. Their primary purpose for doing this was so they could study the Holy Scripture in its original language (Hebrew). This was a most unusual feat, for the Jews had been scattered all over the world by the nations that had conquered them. The depth of a Jew's commitment to God was measured by his being a Hebrew, his having kept up with the language of the ancient people of God, and his studying the Scripture in its original language. Note: Paul said that he, too, was a Hebrew. He could make the very same claim as the false teachers.
2. The false teachers claimed to be Israelites; that is, they were citizens of God's chosen race, Israel. All Israelites were considered the descendants of the great patriarch Jacob. The history of Jacob shows that he had always been a *supplanter*, a man who was always deceiving or mistreating others. However, in facing a particular crisis, he began to seek the Lord. Despite his seeking, peace and assurance would not come, but he did not give up. He struggled and struggled with God hour after hour throughout

the night, confessing and repenting of his sinful life. His perseverance paid off. God met him, forgave his sin, and reaffirmed the covenant of His love with Jacob. As a symbol of His covenant and of Jacob's changed life, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, the name that was to become the covenant name of God's people throughout the Old Testament.

As stated above, by claiming to be Israelites the false teachers were claiming to be citizens of God's chosen people, to be the covenant people of God, the people who had been adopted by God as His very special people. Note that Paul claimed to be an Israelite.

3. The false teachers claimed to be "Abraham's descendants, the very seed promised Abraham"; that is, they were to receive all the promises made to Abraham (see *Abraham*, Jn. 4:22; *Jews, the Seed of Abraham*, Rom. 4:1-25):

=> that he would be the father of a great nation.

=> that his nation of people would be a blessing to all the other nations of the earth.

=> that his line of people would be the roots or lineage of the Messiah or Saviour of the world.

Again, Paul claimed to be of the seed of Abraham and to be a descendant of Abraham. The false teachers and critics were not superior to him in their godly heritage. He was as committed as they were...

- to the study of the Scripture (a Hebrew).
- to being a true follower of God's covenant (an Israelite).
- to trusting and hoping in the promises made to Abraham (a seed of Abraham).

Thought 1. Every minister of the gospel must have a godly heritage. He must live and move and have his being in God, never failing to walk in the Lord. He must develop...

- the godly heritage of faithfully studying the Scripture.

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

1 Pet 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

- the godly heritage of faithfully following the covenant, that is, the will and commandments of God.

Mat 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Mat 7:24-25 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

John 14:21 “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

John 15:10, 14 “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love... You are my friends if you do what I command.”

1 John 3:23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

- the godly heritage of faithfully trusting and hoping in the promises of God.

Rom 4:20-24 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

2 Pet 1:4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

1 John 2:25 And this is what he promised us — even eternal life.

III. **2 Corinthians 11:23–31 Minister: More than a Minister**

The minister must be more than a minister. He must go well beyond ministering and labouring and suffering. The minister must do far more than most people. Paul says that he was more of a minister than the false leaders and teachers. He was able to make such a claim because he went well beyond in labouring and sacrificing for Christ.

Thought 1. Every minister of Christ should go well beyond most in labouring and sacrificing for Christ.

- 1) Diligent labour and sacrifice are the strongest answers to critics.
- 2) Diligent labour and sacrifice are the only conceivable ways the world and its desperate needs will be reached and met for Christ. We must heed the commission of the Lord — all of us who have been called to be His ministers.

1. The minister must be more than a minister in that he labours and suffers more than most men do for Christ. Note the general sacrifices and sufferings of Paul.
 - a. He laboured more than those who were claiming to be ministers of Christ. He worked longer hours and more diligently than they. He focused upon ministering for Christ throughout the day and did not allow his attention to become diverted and waste time here and there with non-essentials as so many of them did. He just laboured more diligently than they did.
 - b. He suffered beatings and stripes beyond measure, that is, a countless number of times.
 - c. He suffered being imprisoned far more than those who claimed to be ministers of Christ. Clement of Rome says that Paul was in prison seven times (Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. “Tyndale Bible Commentaries,” p. 161).
 - d. He often suffered the threat of death. He was almost constantly facing death for Christ. Imagine living under such pressure! What an unbelievable love this great minister had for our Lord!
2. The minister must be more than a minister in that he remains faithful while suffering for Christ. Note the specific sufferings of Paul.

So little is really known about Paul. This passage points out just how little. He was writing the Corinthian church from Ephesus. His stay in Ephesus is found in Acts 19. Naturally, this list of sufferings only records what had happened to Paul before that time. Only the annals of eternity will record what sufferings were borne after Ephesus. Paul said in Acts 20:23, “In every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.” (See notes, 2 Cor. 6:4-10.)

- a. “Five times...lashes”: none of these events are recorded (v. 24).
- b. “Three times...rods”: only one event is recorded (v. 25. See Acts 16:22.)
- c. “Once stoned” (v. 25. See Acts 16:19.)
- d. “Shipwrecked three times”: none of these is recorded. The shipwreck recorded in Acts 27 happened after this writing (v. 25). This means he was shipwrecked at least four times. Just imagine the terror!
- e. “Constantly on the move”: perilous and fatiguing, dangerous and uncomfortable (v. 26).
- f. “Danger from rivers”: literally, rivers, swollen streams, flash floods. There were few bridges in that day (v. 26).
- g. “Danger from bandits”: compare the Good Samaritan (v. 26. See Lk. 10:25-37.)
- h. Danger from his own countrymen, the Jews (v. 26. See Acts 9:23, 29; 13:50; 14:5; 17:5, 13; 18:12; 23:12; 24:27.) This was due to the fact that Paul preached:
=> a crucified Messiah to all men instead of a Messiah of glory who was to come to free Israel and set the nation up as the leading nation of the world.

=> a salvation of grace instead of law, of faith instead of works.

- i. Danger from Gentiles: for example, in Philippi (Acts 16:20f and in Ephesus (Acts 19:23f) (v. 26).
- j. Danger in the city: for example at Damascus (Acts 9:23f) and at Ephesus (Acts 19:23f) (v. 26).
- k. Danger in the country: for example, exposure to the heat, cold, storms, wild animals and robbers (v. 26).
- l. Danger at sea: for example, pirates and unexpected storms (v. 26).
- m. Danger from false brothers: those who professed to be Christians, yet were only making false professions and stood as a constant threat in opposing the mission of the church and the true minister of Christ (v. 26).
- n. “Laboured and toiled”: severe work and labour, toil, fatigue, exhaustion, travail to the point that the body ached and hurt (v. 27).
- o. “Have often gone without sleep”: being unable to sleep because of being burdened, anxious, weary or because of praying for the needs of God’s people (v. 27).
- p. “Have known hunger and thirst”: going without food and water because of sacrificing all he was and had to preach and minister to the desperate needs of others (v. 27).
- q. “Have often gone without food”: going without in order to seek God’s face for others or to give to meet the needs of others (v. 27).
- r. “Have been cold and naked”: being exposed to the elements of nature and giving all that he had to help the needy, even to the point of giving his clothes and suffering the cold of winters and the dampness and cold of dungeons and prisons (v. 27).
- s. “The daily pressure of my concern”: means to press upon. The force of the Greek cannot be adequately expressed. It is like being smothered in a blanket; crushed by a great animal; bearing one down. It is an intolerable load — a heavy, heavy burden. Paul held a daily pressure of anxiety for the churches, a daily burden for their moral and doctrinal purity (v. 28).
- t. He suffered and sympathized and felt the sufferings of others: when others were weak, he counted himself as weak in order to drive himself to teach them more. When others were offended, that is, led astray and caused to stumble into sin, he became indignant and inflamed against those who set the evil example or taught the false doctrine (v. 29).

The point to note is Paul’s faithfulness through all his sufferings. Nothing turned him away from Christ or his ministry. Christ had called him to preach and minister, and he would not be stopped except by death.

Mat 5:11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”

Mat 10:22 “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

Mat 10:39 “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Acts 9:16 “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Rom 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Heb 11:25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

3. The minister must boast only in his weaknesses. Remember: Paul had started out to boast in who he was and in what he had accomplished. But note what he has ended up doing: sharing those things about which most men would be ashamed and never mention: the *rejections and humiliating experiences* he has suffered at the hands of men and nature. *Men and society were constantly rejecting him*, and nature was always posing a threat to his safety and livelihood.

The point is this: Paul had laid down the principle that *a minister must boast only in his weaknesses and sufferings for Christ*, not in his position, achievements, accomplishments or results. Men do not applaud rejections, weaknesses, sufferings and shameful experiences. But when a minister suffers for Christ, he has something to boast about — something that is *acceptable to God*: the minister’s faithful witness to Christ.

4. The minister must not exaggerate or lie about his sufferings. Paul calls God to witness that he has not exaggerated or lied about his sufferings. Of course, no minister should ever boast of anything he has ever done or borne for Christ — unless he is forced to defend himself. And, if he is ever called upon to boast...
 - he is to boast only of his weaknesses.
 - he is not to exaggerate or lie.

Thought 1. What an indictment against so many of us! May God stir out hearts to totally commit our lives to Christ. And may He teach us...

- to quit boasting in our numbers.
- to quit seeking recognition and praise.
- to boast only in our wonderful Lord and His glorious grace — the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. 2 Corinthians 11:32–33 Paul, a Minister of God

The false teachers and critics were probably saying that Paul had acted like a coward in his earlier flight from Damascus. A coward is unworthy to be followed and obeyed. Paul

answered by showing that a powerful ruler was after him, but God's purposes could not be stopped. He was delivered and sent on his way to further the gospel. (Cp. Acts 9:23f.)

Thought 1. No matter the opposition, *God will deliver* his dear servant to continue on in the ministry and to preach Christ. The minister may be led by God to move on elsewhere, but God will continue to use him to share the gospel of Christ and to minister to the needs of people. God will strengthen him to overcome all disappointment and discouragement. ■