

2 Corinthians 11

(New International Version)

*I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me! ² I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent **◆**s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.*

⁵ I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." ⁶ I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. ⁷ Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. ¹⁰ As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. ¹¹ Why? Because I do not love you??God knows I do!

¹² And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. ¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Paul Boasts About His Sufferings

¹⁶ I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. ¹⁷ In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. ¹⁸ Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. ¹⁹ You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! ²⁰ In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or

takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face.

²¹ *To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!*

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about ♦I am speaking as a fool ♦I also dare to boast about. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham ♦s descendants? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

²⁵ *Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I*

have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

³⁰ *If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever,*

knows that I am not lying. ³² In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. ³³ But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

Study Notes

2 CORINTHIANS 11:1

Paul asked the Corinthian believers to bear with him as he talked "like a fool." In other words, Paul felt foolish rehearsing his credentials as a preacher of the Good News (11:16-21). But he thought that he had to do this in order to silence the false teachers (11:13).

2 CORINTHIANS 11:2

Paul was anxious that the church's love should be for Christ alone, just as a pure bride saves her love for one man only. By "pure bride" he meant one who was unaffected by false doctrine.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:3

The Corinthians pure and simple devotion to Christ was being threatened by false teaching. Paul did not want the believers to lose their single-minded love for Christ. Keeping Christ first in our life can be very difficult when we have so many distractions threatening to sidetrack our faith. Just as Eve lost her focus by listening to the serpent, we, too, can lose our focus by letting our life become overcrowded and confused. Is there anything that weakens your commitment to keep Christ first in your life? How can you minimize the distractions that threaten your devotion to him?

2 CORINTHIANS 11:3, 4

The Corinthian believers fell for smooth talk and messages that sounded good and seemed to make sense. Today there are many false teachings that seem to make sense. Don't believe someone simply because he or she sounds like an authority or says words you like to hear. Search the Bible and check his or her teachings against God's Word. The Bible should be your authoritative guide.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:4

The false teachers distorted the truth about Jesus and ended up preaching a different Jesus, a different spirit than the Holy Spirit, and a different way of salvation. Those who teach anything different from what God's infallible Word says are both mistaken and misleading.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:5

Paul was saying that these marvelous teachers ("super-apostles") were no better than he was. They may have been more eloquent speakers, but they spoke lies and were servants of Satan.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:6

Paul, a brilliant thinker, was not a trained, eloquent speaker. Although his ministry was effective (see Acts 17), he had not been trained in the Greek schools

of oratory and speechmaking, as many of the false teachers probably had been. Paul believed in a simple presentation of the Good News (see 1 Corinthians 1:17), and some people thought this showed simple-mindedness. Thus, Paul's speaking performance was often used against him by false teachers. In all our teaching and preaching, content is far more important than the presentation. A simple, clear presentation that helps listeners understand will be of great value.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:7

The Corinthians may have thought that preachers could be judged by how much money they demanded. A good speaker would charge a large sum, a fair speaker would be a little cheaper, and a poor speaker would speak for free. The false teachers may have argued that because Paul asked no fee for his preaching, he must have been an amateur, with little authority or competence. Believers today must be careful not to assume that every preacher or evangelist who is well known or who demands a large honorarium is superior at teaching God's Word.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:7-12

Paul could have asked the Corinthian church for financial support. Jesus himself taught that those who minister for God should be supported by the people to whom they minister (Matthew 10:10). But Paul thought that asking for support in Corinth might be misunderstood. There were many false teachers who hoped to make a good profit from preaching (2:17), and Paul might look like one of them. Paul separated himself completely from those false teachers in order to silence those who only claimed to do God's work.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:14, 15

One Jewish writing (the Apocalypse of Moses) says that the story of Eve's temptation includes Satan masquerading as an angel. Paul may have been thinking of this story, or he could have been referring to Satan's typical devices. In either case, nothing could be more deceitful than Satan, the prince of darkness (Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:13), disguising himself as an angel of light. In the same way, these false apostles were pretending to be apostles of Christ, while in reality they were agents of Satan.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:14, 15

Satan and his servants can deceive us by appearing to be attractive, good, and moral. Many unsuspecting people follow smooth-talking, Bible-quoting leaders into cults that alienate them from their families and lead them into the practice of immorality and deceit. Don't be fooled by external appearances. Our

impressions alone are not an accurate indicator of who is or isn't a true follower of Christ; so it helps to ask these questions: (1) Do the teachings confirm Scripture (Acts 17:11)? (2) Does the teacher affirm and proclaim that Jesus Christ is God, who came into the world as a man to save people from their sins (1 John 4:1-3)? (3) Is the teacher's life-style consistent with biblical morality (Matthew 12:33-37)?

2 CORINTHIANS 11:22, 23

Paul presented his credentials to counteract the charges that the false teachers were making against him. He felt foolish boasting like this, but his list of credentials would silence any doubts about his authority. Paul wanted to keep the Corinthians from slipping under the spell of the false teachers and turning away from the Good News. Paul also gave a list of his credentials in his letter to the Philippians (see Philippians 3:4-8).

2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-29

Paul was angry that the false teachers had impressed and deceived the Corinthians (11:13-15). Therefore, he had reestablished his credibility and authority by listing the trials he had endured in his service for Christ. Some of these trials are recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 14:19; 16:22-24). Because Paul wrote this letter during his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:17), his trials weren't over. He would experience yet further difficulties and humiliations for the cause of Christ (see Acts 21:30-33; 22:24-30). Paul was sacrificing his life for the Good News, something the false teachers would never do. The trials and hurts we experience for Christ's sake build our character, demonstrate our faith, and prepare us for further service to the Lord.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:25

Sea travel was not as safe as it is today. Paul had been shipwrecked three times, and he would face another accident on his voyage to Rome (see Acts 27). By this time, Paul had probably made at least eight or nine voyages.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:28, 29

Not only did Paul face beatings and dangers, he also carried the daily concern for the young churches, worrying that they were staying true to the Good News and free from false teachings and inner strife. Paul was concerned for individuals

in the churches he served. If God has placed you in a position of leadership and authority, treat people with Paul's kind of empathy and concern.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:32, 33

King Aretas, king of the Nabateans (Edomites) from 9 B.C. to A.D. 40, had appointed a governor to oversee the Nabatean segment of the population in Damascus. Somehow the Jews in Damascus had been able to enlist this governor to help them try to capture Paul (see Acts 9:22-25). Paul gave an example here, describing his escape from Damascus in a basket lowered from a window in the city wall. Paul recounted this incident to show what he had endured for Christ. The false teachers couldn't make such claims.