



PRIMARY SCRIPTURES

16 I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. 17 What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. 18 Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. 19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. 21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

SUMMARY

Alarmed at the influence of false teachers in the Corinthian church (whom Paul called “false apostles, deceitful workmen, and servants of Satan”), Paul addressed the problem head-on. The false apostles had been boasting about themselves, slandering Paul, and being abusive to the Corinthian believers. Paul, against his better wishes, decided to speak in the same language as the false apostles, in order to get the Corinthians’ attention: namely, the language of foolish boasting. Paul believed the real credentials of a servant of Christ are measured by the hardships endured while serving Jesus. He then laid out (in boastful fashion) a long list of the many serious, dangerous hardships he has endured as a servant of Jesus, re-confirmed his love for the Corinthians, and ended up boasting about his weakness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read some (or all, it won’t take long!) of the accounts from the Book of Acts about Paul’s hardships that he endured while traveling across Asia and spreading the gospel message. In each case, what was the root cause of Paul’s hardships? Why did Paul not change his approach in order to avoid further hardships? Why didn’t Paul simply quit? References (all in Acts): 9.22-25; 9.28-30; 13.48-51; 14.2-6; 14.19-20; 16.18, 22-24; 16.39; 17.1-10; 17.13-14; 18.11-12; 19.26, 28-29; 20.2-3. Compare Paul’s apostleship with the “super apostle”. In what ways are they different?
2. Why do you think boasting about ourselves (our character, our accomplishments, etc.) “foolish”?
3. Why were the Corinthians duped (tricked, fooled) by the false apostles, i.e., why did they fail to recognize the false teaching and the insincere /fake character of the false apostles?
4. What hardships have you endured that show you are a servant of Jesus? How did you react to these hardships?
5. Most hardships cause us to become anxious, fearful, disappointed, etc. What could you do differently in the midst of hardships that would imitate Paul, who “learned to be content in all circumstances”?
6. What “spiritual ancestor(s)” were instrumental in helping you put your faith in Jesus? What could you do to express your thanks to them for their assistance in this? (You might consider committing to do something, in which case, who will you ask to hold you accountable to do it?)

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