

Introduction

Slick—always boasting in his popularity with the ladies

1. In chapters 10-13 Paul is in essence defending himself against the claims and attacks of a group of so called “**super apostles**” (e.g. false apostles)—men who had come into the church boasting of their skills and credentials while disparaging Paul
2. They had poisoned the Corinthians against Paul and in the process were misleading them
3. To counter the influence of these men, Paul begins in chapter 10 by subtly comparing and contrasting his behavior with these super-apostles
4. In chapter 11, Paul begins to engage in what he refers to as “**a little foolishness**”
 - a. He refers to it as foolishness because it involves boasting—or bragging—about his credentials as an apostle
 - b. This is something to which Paul has an aversion but the prideful boasting of the false teachers, and the Corinthians tolerance of it, compelled Paul to have to engage in some boasting of his own
 - c. Last week we learned of Paul’s MOTIVATION in boasting—1) concern over the Corinthians well-being and 2) his desire to protect them (unlike the false apostles who were motivated by their own self-interests)
 - d. In our passage today, we will ultimately discover the CONTENT of Paul’s boasting and in how it differed from that of the false super-apostles

A. Paul resisted boasting in himself which made him look weak in the eyes of the Corinthians when compared to the false apostles (11:16-21)

1. Paul calls on the Corinthians to indulge him in a little boasting (16-17):
 - a. The word Paul uses here simply means to express an unusually high degree of confidence in someone or something, to speak highly
 - b. It is used in a both a positive and a negative way in the NT:
 - 1) Paul has used this same word multiple times in this very letter to speak of how he had boasted about the Corinthians to others:
 - a) 7:4: “**Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.**”
 - b) 7:14: “**For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth.**”
 - c) 8:24: “**Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and our reason for boasting about you.**”
 - 2) However, in the opening verses of our passage today Paul is referring to a negative form of boasting:
 - a) We know this because he calls it foolishness (16): “**Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little.**”

- b) He writes that this form of boasting is not something that the Lord would do (17): **“What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting.”**
 - c) This boasting, Paul writes, is a boasting: **“according to the flesh”**—in other words, boasting in one’s self, his own stature and abilities
- 3) So why would Paul call on the Corinthians to indulge him in such boasting, such foolishness?
- a) The prideful boasting of the false apostles had won over the Corinthians (18-19): **“Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. 19 For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly.”**
 - b) This led to them being mistreated by the false apostles (20): **“For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face.”**
 - They had been enslaved
 - They had been devoured
 - They had been taken advantage of
 - They had been **“hit in the face”**
 - c) Because Paul had refused to boast in himself, he seemed weak in comparison to the false apostles (21): **“To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison”**
 - d) So, Paul’s boasting was in response to the false apostles (21b): **“But in whatever respect anyone else is bold-- I speak in foolishness-- I am just as bold myself.”**

B. Unlike the false apostles, Paul had legitimate reasons to boast in himself (22-29)

1. He could boast in his heritage because he was a Hebrew of Hebrews (22): **“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”**
2. He could boast in his service and suffering for Christ (23-27):
 - a. His service for Christ was superior to that of the false apostles (23a): **“Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so.”**
 - b. They could not measure up to the physical torture he routinely endured (READ 23b-25): “
 - c. They could not measure up to the danger he constantly faced (READ 26)
 - d. They could not measure up to his level of labor and hardship (READ 27)
3. He could boast because of his deep concern for the Church (28-29):
 - a. False teachers are always motivated by their own greed and what’s good for them:
 - 1) In 1 Timothy 6:3-5 Paul describes such men as trouble-makers who use their fake righteousness as a means for personal gain
 - 2) He repeats this in Romans 16:17-18 where he writes that they serve their own personal interests rather than Christ
 - 3) In the same passage, and again in 2 Timothy 2:17-18, he describes them as those who upset the faith of God’s people
 - b. But Paul wasn’t motivated by his own self-interests, but his concern for God’s people, the Church (READ 28-29):

- 1) He describes his concern for “**all the churches**” as a “**daily pressure**”
 - 2) When others were weak, he became weak alongside them
 - 3) When others sinned, he experienced “**intense concern**” for them
4. Finally, he could boast because he was given superior revelation (READ 12:2-4)

C. However, when compelled to boast, Paul chose to boast in his weaknesses (11:30-12:10):

1. Paul had been compelled to boast by the Corinthians:
 - a. “**If I have to boast...**” (11:30)
 - b. “**Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable...**” (12:1)
 - c. “**I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me.**” (12:11)
2. But, rather than boast foolishly in himself and his strengths, Paul chose to boast in his weaknesses (11:30): “**If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness**” (11:30):

**We discover three reasons why Paul boasted in his weaknesses rather than in his strengths

- a. First, Paul saw no personal purpose or value in boasting in himself (12:1): “**Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.**”
- b. Second, he didn’t want others to credit him with more than he deserved (12:5-6): “**On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. 6 For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.**”
- c. Third and finally, he desired God’s power to be perfected in him (12:7-11):
 - 1) After being caught up into heaven, Paul was given a “**thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me**” to keep him from exalting himself (7-8; e.g. thinking too highly of himself)
 - 2) He begged the Lord to take it away, but the Lord refused because His power could only be perfected in Paul through Paul’s weakness (9): “**And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’**”
 - 3) For this reason, Paul would rather take pride in his weaknesses in order that Christ’s power would be manifest in him (9b): “**Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.**”
 - 4) And even more remarkably, Paul didn’t accept his weaknesses begrudgingly, but he did this “**gladly**” (9) and learned to be content with them for the sake of Christ (10): “**Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.**”

D. Paul ends his boasting with a stern rebuke (READ 12:11-13)

1. The Corinthians had forced Paul to foolishly boast about himself when he’d rather boast about his weaknesses and how Christ power was perfected in those
2. He should not have had to boast; rather they should have commended him:

- a. He was in no way inferior to the false super-apostles
 - b. His ministry to them was accompanied by “the signs of a true apostle”—signs and wonders and miracles (unlike the false apostles)
3. They had no reason to believe (as the false apostles were supposedly claiming) that they were inferior or less important to Paul’s other churches

Conclusion

1. What do we boast in?
2. Do we boast in our own abilities, skills, accomplishments, credentials?
3. Or, do we boast in our weaknesses knowing that the power of Christ can only be perfected in us through those weaknesses?
4. We did nothing to gain our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9): **“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and ^[a]that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**
5. Paul wrote that the Gospel excludes our ability to boast in ourselves (Romans 3:27): **“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.”**
6. We now have reason to boast...in God (Romans 15:17): **“Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.”**
- 7.