

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Introduction

American Icon Contestant Boasting

My boasting in 6th grade choir trials: "I'll make you sound good"

1. Paul's primary purpose in writing chapters 10-13 is to call on the Corinthians to prepare for his upcoming visit
 - a. The last visit—the "painful visit" didn't go too well:
 - 1) We don't know why Paul made the trip but it appears to have been unplanned and in response to some serious concerns or reports
 - 2) One of the main issues had to do with the arrival of so-called "super" or false apostles that had arrived in Corinth
 - 3) These men were leading the Corinthians astray by their false teaching, and were bad mouthing Paul and his companions
 - 4) Somehow, they had persuaded the Corinthians that Paul and his companions were not who they professed to be, that they had no authority, and that they were in fact defrauding the Corinthians
 - b. Paul followed up the painful visit with a very direct and pointed letter—referred to as the severe letter—which apparently offended some but led others to repentance
 - c. He was now preparing for his third visit on which he fully intended to address any remaining issues related to the false apostles and unrepentant believers
2. In order to be ready for Paul's visit the Corinthians needed to understand and accept a few things:
 - a. The first was that Paul didn't want to have to be "bold" with them and punish them when he arrived; he preferred to find them living in obedience to Christ when he arrived
 - b. The second, was that in spite of the false apostles' claims about Paul only being bold when he was absent (via his letters) but weak when he was present, he was fully prepared to punish them for their sin if he had to
 - c. A third thing they needed to understand was that these men who had infiltrated their churches were false apostles who were leading them astray and enslaving them
3. Paul begins to address this issue of the false teachers in our passage today and does it by comparing himself and his ministry to theirs which leads to what Paul refers to as some foolish boasting
4. Now, boasting is almost always frowned upon in the Scriptures, but as we will see today, in Paul's case it was more than appropriate and served a valuable purpose (two main points)

A. Paul's boasting was driven out of concern for the Corinthians (11:1-6)

1. He begins by calling on the Corinthians to put up with "**a little foolishness**" (1): "**I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.**"
 - a. The ESV, Holman and NIV do a better job of rendering the second half of this verse as something along the lines, "**Please put up with me [as I boast a little]!**"

- b. The foolishness to which Paul refers is the boasting he is about to do, beginning in vs. 5-6 and continuing through this chapter and the next
- c. He refers to it as foolishness for a couple of reasons:
 - 1) First, boasting in oneself is generally a bad thing in the Bible because it's usually based in arrogance and pride—this is exactly what the false apostles were doing
 - 2) Second, Paul should not have had to boast to the Corinthians regarding his authority, credentials, devotion and commitment to Christ, love for the saints, etc.!

- b. But, they had forced his hand and put him in the uncomfortable position of having to boast in order to defend himself

- 5. In verse 2-4 we find that Paul's boasting was motivated by his concerns for the Corinthians:
 - a. He was concerned about their fidelity with Christ (2): **“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.”**
 - b. He was concerned that they were being led astray (3): **“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”**
 - c. He was concerned about their lack of discernment (4): **“For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.”**

- 6. In verses 4-5 we find Paul's first boast as he defends himself against what he refers to as the **“super-apostles”** (5-6):
 - a. He was not inferior to such men (5): **“For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.”**
 - 1) The NET, ESV, Holman and NIV all use the phrase **“super-apostles”** which is derogatory term and a great way to capture Paul's intent
 - 2) These men felt they were superior to Paul because of their eloquent oration skills, their prominence and popularity, and even the fact that they made their living by teaching unlike Paul who was a tent-maker
 - 3) Paul refused to accept their claims of superiority
 - b. While Paul may not have been able to boast in his eloquence as these super-apostles did, he could boast in his knowledge of Christ (6): **“But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made this evident to you in all things.”**
 - 1) Oration skills were highly prized in ancient Rome and rhetoric and style were valued more than the actual content of the message—in other words, how you said something was more important than what you said
 - 2) Paul rejected this and had already addressed it with the Corinthians (READ 1 Corinthians 2:1-5)
 - 3) This is why he says here that **“in every way we have made this evident to you in all things”**

B. Paul's boasting was intended to protect the Corinthians (7-15)

1. Unlike the so-called super-apostles, Paul ministered to the Corinthians without charge or accepting their financial assistance (7-9):
 - a. In ancient Greek and Roman culture, philosophers and teachers were expected to charge (or accept financial gifts) for their teaching:
 - 4) Manual labor by teachers, like Paul's tent making, was looked down upon
 - 5) It was felt that if you had anything of value to teach, you would demand getting a fair price for your knowledge
 - 6) Likewise, there was a certain pride and self-satisfaction in supporting your favorite philosopher, especially for the wealthy
 - 7) In fact, it was considered an insult not to accept compensation
 - b. So, Paul's refusal to charge or accept financial help from the Corinthians was a huge stumbling block (READ 7-9):
 - 1) They apparently went as far as to consider Paul's actions in refusing payment a sin
 - 2) However, by humbling himself (e.g. manual labor making tents) and accepting gifts from other churches, Paul prevented himself from being a burden to them
 - 3) This was in direct contrast to the super-apostles who had taken advantage of the Corinthians (READ 11:19-20)
 - 4) It was also something Paul would continue to do (9b): **"and [I] will continue to do so."**

2. Paul's boasting (about preaching the Gospel without charge) was intended to protect the Corinthians by calling out the false-apostles (10-15):
 - a. Paul refused to not boast because he loved and cared for the Corinthians (10-11): **"As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!"**
 - b. So, because he loved the Corinthians, he would continue to boast in an effort to undermine or cut-off the influence and opportunity of the super-apostles (12): **"But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting."**
 - 1) The super-apostles boasted about their equality with Paul, and in fact considered themselves superior
 - 2) One part of their argument was that they were legit and superior because they charged for their teaching while Paul did not
 - 3) However, rather than being apostles they were fakes (13): **"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ."**
 - a) They were pseudo apostles—meaning they weren't real
 - b) They were **"deceitful workers"** which means they used treacherous means to deceive people
 - c) They were **"disguising themselves as apostles of Christ"** which means that they were concealing their true identity by pretending to be apostles of Christ
 - d) Paul reveals their true identity in verses 14-15: **"No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants [e.g. the false apostles] also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."**
 - c. Paul's intent here is not to disparage those who receive gifts or make their living honestly preaching the Gospel:

- 1) While Paul worked to meet his own needs, he also accepted help from others like the Macedonia's he mentions in 11:9
- 2) He also defended the rights of those who make their living preaching the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 9:1-14
- 3) However, in that same chapter, and here in 2 Corinthians, we see that Paul chose not to exercise this right for at least two reasons:
 - a) One is found in our passage today: Paul did not want to burden those to whom he sought to preach the Gospel (e.g. place them under financial obligation)
 - b) The second is found in 1 Corinthians 9:16 which is that Paul didn't want preaching the Gospel to be something he did under compulsion, but rather something he did voluntarily
- d. By not demanding compensation from the Corinthian or accepting their gifts for his ministry, Paul was able to confront the false apostles and establish a stark contrast between himself and them

Conclusion

1. One of the major shortcomings of the Corinthians was that they favored style over substance:
 - a. This is a huge problem for the Church even today
 - b. The Church is filled with leaders—pastors, teachers, authors—who are more style than substance
 - c. False teaching thrives because so many are drawn in by the charming personalities, eloquent speech and slick sounding rhetoric of the false teachers
 - d. As a result, just like the Corinthians, so many are led astray and taken captive
2. This leaves me with two questions for us today?
 - a. Are we attracted to pastors, teachers, authors because of their eloquence or style rather than the content of what they teach?
 - b. Have we allowed ourselves to be deceived and led astray by those who are likeable and popular because we failed to exercise Biblical discernment?
3. For me personally, it presents a question as well: what kind of teacher do I want to be, one who values style over substance or substance over style?