

2 Corinthians 11 pt. 3 v. 16-33

V.16-18 Paul is being treated contemptibly by some in the Corinthian church, and as he defends himself he feels quite foolish about the whole thing.

The Corinthians on the other hand felt unduly qualified to pronounce judgments against Paul. Apparently they believed that they had progressed in this christianity thing beyond their teacher and now they were in a position to “put him in his place.”

Sometimes we feel like we’re smarter than the next person. Our hearts can become hardened towards others and even towards God’s word. We fail to recognize our own inadequacies and need for teaching and discipleship.

BTW our need for teaching and discipleship never ends. We only culminate once we leave this world behind and are perfected in eternity. And that is a work that Christ completes on His terms.

[Phi 1:6 NKJV] 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete [it] until the day of Jesus Christ;

When we arrive at a place where we count ourselves as the judge of God’s servants, and we adopt the hyper-critical nature that sees every

misstep in the life of another - we find ourselves sowing to the flesh in the garden of self-righteousness AND ignorance.

Apart from Christ, apart from an intentional reflection on the unmerited favor of God upon us, we are prone to cultivating self-righteousness in our lives like weeds in our front garden beds.

AND, if we are not careful we find that we become unteachable, unable to receive - over run with the weeds of self-righteousness in our hearts. And those weeds can survive nearly any attack against them - but the fruit that was planted by the Spirit and the Word begins to be choked out.

If a man or woman doesn't meet our desired qualifications in age, education, stature, race or socio-economic status we may dismiss them as "less than, or foolish" and we may place ourselves above them. All the while, in our self-righteousness, we ignore the fact that it is God who chooses the instrument he will use, and he often does so without consulting us on the matter.

Remember - [1Co 1:26-29 NKJV] 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called]. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the

things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Unfortunately, this was lost on some in Corinth.

It hurt Paul that these people he loved so dearly considered him to be a fool.

So, in order to correct their aberrant thinking, Paul indulges in what he recognizes to be foolish behavior - wherein he spends time laying out his resume'.

This is painful to read as well. No servant of Christ should be caught up in this - and yet it is almost demanded of Paul by the Corinthians.

Unless he can correct them, and cause them to see their error, they are bound for further divergence from the way of truth -- from what the church was meant to be - a family, a body knit together in love and mutual edification in the person of Jesus Christ.

Do our families care where we went to school? What credentials or letters we have behind our names? No. They love us because we are bound together by blood. And in Christ, we the church, are bound together by His blood.

Remember it was the Disciples/Apostles who originally began the discussion on who is greatest.

It was Christ who finished it - in totality - so why do we need to have it again?

We don't...we are all unqualified to serve as His ambassadors in our own strength.

BUT Christ has brought us into His Kingdom and has commissioned us for His work - in spite of our lack of credentialing - **BECAUSE WE ARE TO RELY ON HIS CREDENTIALS!**

We would do well to remember this in our interactions with one another, with other Christians, with unbelievers.

Let us BE Fools for Christ's sake. And may we see the glory in that blessing.

And if we must boast...let us boast in our weakness, our failure, and the supremacy of God's Grace demonstrated in the person of Christ.

In so doing we preach the gospel to others in our weakness but His strength and we offer hope to the forlorn - for those who feel they are not smart enough, cool enough, clean enough, churched enough.

Come to the cross with your shortcomings, come to the cross alongside the rest of us fools, and meet the one who IS qualified to rule over all creation.

V.19-21 We learn that the Corinthians had a tendency to put up with being taken advantage of but not in a Christ like manner.

Christ does in fact teach us to endure suffering, to endure being taken advantage of, to even endure being struck in the face. Hard words. Hard to accept. Hard to practice.

[Mat 5:38-42 NKJV] 38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have [your] cloak also. 41 "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

The Corinthians though did so in a manner that even turned their suffering into manipulation and allowed manipulation and a carefully crafted hierarchy to grow inside Christ's church, AND attempted to curry favor from so called "extra-super Apostles" and so elevate their standing.

We must also keep in mind that all of these things should not be happening inside the Body!

Bondage, devouring others, taking from others, exalting one over another, striking people on the face!

This has the stench of the Pharisees upon it.

[Mat 23:4, 12-14 NKJV] 4 "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay [them] on men's shoulders; but they [themselves] will not move them with one of their fingers. ... 12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. 13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in [yourselves], nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

May we be mindful of this warning.

V.22-28 The marks of an Apostle.

Put bluntly, the marks of an Apostle include suffering for Christ's sake in the service of His bride, the Church.

These too are the marks of his people today.

Paul, hesitantly compelled to lay out his credentials, does just that - but not in a way we might think.

Rather than saying - I planted this many churches this year, I preached to this many hundreds of people, we had this many baptisms, this many conversions, this many tracts were handed out, etc.

Paul says - I suffered.

Are they Hebrews, children of the covenant? Me too. Are they servants of Christ (half-sarcastically) - I am more!

Here's the difference though...I suffered and I do suffer and I will suffer.

Stripes - to be beaten with a whip - uncountable times; prisons - frequently (Clement of Rome - seven times); deaths - often; whipped by his own blood, the Jews - 195 lashes; beaten with rods - three times; stoned!; three times ship-wrecked; night/day in the deep;

Journeys - the toil of the road

Perils: waters (rivers/flooding); robbers; own countrymen (Jews); gentiles; in the city; in the wilderness; in the sea; among FALSE BRETHREN (how heart breaking - even comfort with believers isn't promised);

IN weariness, toil; sleeplessness; hunger and thirst; fasting (voluntary hunger and thirst); cold; nakedness (not having enough)...keep in mind all this came upon an aged man who was in questionable health.

AND IF THAT'S NOT ENOUGH - "THE DAILY PRESSURE - OR THE CROWDING AGAINST ME DAILY...MY CONCERN FOR WHO? MYSELF? NO...THE CHURCHES. PRAISE BE TO GOD that he calls and creates such men who care for the churches, even as His spirit lives in them.

Paul's mind was occupied by the constant concern for the churches - how are they doing? Is everybody okay? I pray they are safe, kept from division, kept from discord, kept from envy and jealousy and selfish ambition. I pray that all are in good health and have enough. I pray that God will keep them from the wicked one. I pray that God will grow them in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray the Lord will grow them in unity.

My heart....my thoughts...my daily concern for the church. As it should be...Christ cares for His church, He considers the church daily. So do his servants.

The point isn't "be like Paul." It's not, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, endure a little more suffering.

Christ allows for each the measure of suffering required for our sanctification.

[Phi 1:29 NKJV] 29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

[1Pe 4:12-14 NKJV] 12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed [are you], for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

AND Christ is the example of endurance. Be bound to Christ, or as Paul says to the Corinthians ...[1Co 11:1 NKJV] 1 Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ.

V.29-31 Paul's reaction to the culmination of all of this AND his relationship with the church.

Paul affirms his weaknesses and his deep concern for those who stumble.

While the NKJV renders it so poetically the NASB adds understanding to the text -- “Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” Nobody! Paul was deeply concerned for those who were led astray. That’s part of his concern for the churches.

Boasting in infirmities (define) - lack of strength, the things that pertain to his weakness.

Others may boast in their successes. Paul boasted in his perceived failures, injuries, hardships...his weakness...as a matter of fact the things that Paul experienced might lead any one of us to come to the justifiable conclusion that perhaps the Lord was closing the door to ministry in Paul’s face -- “maybe you just weren’t meant to do this Paul...”

How foolish of us when we view hardship this way.

God knew Paul’s heart, his credentials, his strengths, and weaknesses, and God chose to use Paul’s weakness as the platform to demonstrate HIS greatness and HIS ability to heal and HIS ability to create and HIS ability to save.

God knows the truth of us all - what we are doing and why we are doing it. Though others may never know -- the good or the bad may remain a mystery to many in our lives.

V.32-33 In one final effort to reiterate the abased nature of ministry Paul relays another humiliating story from his life.

While Paul may have desired to walk out of the city on his own two feet right through the front door, with the multitude chanting...that's how we prefer it...he has to go through the window...like a criminal, a fugitive.

Not often are we met with victory parades in ministry - though some would lobby for that - often we are met with humiliation, debasement, relying on others, and clinging to Christ.

Because it's not about Paul, his pride, his credentials. And it appears that Paul wanted to really drive that message home.

It's about Christ.

[Phi 3:5-11 NKJV] 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which [is] from the law, but that which [is] through faith in

Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Be steadfast beloved. The Spirit within you will make it so.

