

PAUL'S PORTFOLIO

2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-33

I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.

Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold - I speak foolishly - I am bold also.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.

Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all

the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

As I studied this passage and put together my thoughts for this morning, what hit me hardest was *the stark contrast...*

Here I was sitting at home - sheltered from the elements. I was *comfortable, warm, secure, at peace.*

I was reading Paul's words with a cup of coffee in my hand - it had cream and artificial sweetener no less.

There was also enough food in our kitchen to feed a dozen neighbors... Spilling milk on my laptop was the biggest trial I faced the whole morning... I suppose the words that best described me that day was "*at ease.*"

And after reading the last half of 2 Corinthians 11, I wondered what the Apostle Paul would've thought about my version of living for Christ in contrast to his...

There are Christians today with a far more troubling life than us. We sit in padded chairs, and a climate controlled sanctuary, and worship God freely - while believers from muslim lands get jailed, their property is confiscated, they're killed, or run out of their country...

Let me say, it seems foolish for me to be talking to you

about beatings, and shipwrecks, and hunger. What do I know about “*sleeplessness often*” when I usually go home after church on Sundays, and take a nap?

This kind of talk from a person with my advantages seems “*foolish*” - and yet I take comfort in the fact that this kind of talk also seemed “*foolish*” to Paul.

He was embarrassed to bring up his sacrifices and sufferings for Jesus’ sake. Even *the greatest sacrifice*, even a *lifetime of suffering* - pales in comparison to *the eternal God leaving heaven* - *the holy God taking on sin* - *the loving God subjected to man’s hate* - *the living God dying in our place...* all to redeem us to Himself.

Whether our calling from God is a quiet life of humble dedication, or a brave life of persecution and hardship, we’re foolish to brag about what we’ve done.

All the glory and honor belongs to Jesus! Our lot in life is set by God’s will, and His grace is sufficient for whatever demands His providence might place on us.

Paul begins in verse 16, “*I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.*” In Chapter 11 Paul does something he avoids doing almost everywhere else. *He boasts!* He acts *the fool* by focusing on himself.

In any discussion involving the gospel of grace why would you ever put the spotlight on your own portfolio?

“*Grace*” is love that’s on the house. It’s unmerited, undeserved. Its origin is God’s heart, not my works. That means, it’s not about me - it’s all about Jesus!

To boast in our own achievements is truly foolish.

Some of you recall Mr. T, the beloved tough guy of the 1980s. He was on the A-team - even showed up in a Rocky film. And one thing Mr. T didn't like was "fools." Mr. T had a famous expression, "I pity the fool."

Actually, Mr. T, or Lawrence Tureaud, his real name, is a Christian. He's a cancer survivor who credits the book of Job for getting him through with his faith intact.

After Hurricane Katrina, Tureaud stopped wearing gold chains out of respect for the people who lost everything in the floods. Today, he boldly shares his faith... and *pities the fool* who doesn't bow to Jesus.

Ordinarily, like Mr. T, the Apostle Paul would "*pity the fool*" who talked only about his own experiences rather than highlight the grace that's in Christ, but his critics in Corinth had placed Paul in a difficult situation.

Here in 2 Corinthians 11 Paul was forced to boast.

The false teachers in Corinth were proud and arrogant. They called themselves, "*super apostles,*" as they questioned Paul's apostolic calling and credibility.

His character was the target of their attacks on the Gospel. Thus, by defending the legitimacy of his own ministry, Paul was defending the power of the Gospel.

This is why Paul says in verse 16 he needs to "*boast a little.*" He's about to indulge in a little foolishness - as he said in verse 1, "*a little folly.*" *Consider me a fool if you want, but I'm not acting foolishly - but of necessity.*

He writes, “What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.” Normally, Paul never, ever would’ve spent a chapter talking about himself. Most often Paul followed the example of Jesus... *he assumed a low profile - he identified with others - he was humble - he saw himself as a servant - in all He did He pointed to another!*

Paul was about Jesus - not tooting his own horn.

Yet to prove his own loyalty to the Gospel, in these chapters the Apostle does talk about *the sacrifices he made*, and *the scars he bore* for the Gospel’s sake.

Verse 18, “Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.” Boasting was unusual for Paul, but not for the Corinthians. It was a favorite pastime.

They were always talking about their advantages and achievements. The false prophets in Corinth were legalists. They weren't trusting in *grace*, but relying on *grunt* - that’s why they were so quick to highlight their own charity, and piety, and good works. They bragged in the flesh - in their own human accomplishments.

And here Paul is stooping to their level. He is also going brag about himself and his works - not to earn God’s favor, but to show the results of grace in his life.

To grasp the next verse, *read it with some sarcasm.*

Paul writes, “For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!” *The Corinthians were so stuck-up - they perceived themselves as so wise - if they were in the habit of tolerating foolish boasts why not put up with Paul’s*

foolishness for a few moments?

Paul isn't doing anything they don't usually welcome.

In fact, the Corinthians didn't just tolerate the proud and selfish boasting of the false prophets, they put up with all kinds of foolishness from them... Paul writes in verse 20, **“For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.”**

As I mentioned last week, over the years it has amazed me at the abuse gullible Christians, church members, willingly take from so-called spiritual leaders.

There are pastors who use their clout, even their spiritual authority, to misuse people for their own ends.

Notice the crimes done by these false apostles, **“put in bondage, devour, take, exalt himself, strike.”** Here's the modus operandi of *“a false man of God.”* Here's how bogus pastors manipulate and control people...

Through **“bondage”** - they're great at legalistic guilt trips. They expect you to adopt their unbiblical norms. By pushing people around they feel more important.

They **“devour”** - they *prey on people*, not *pray for people*. The false apostle is *a butcher* not *a shepherd*.

They're also on the **“take.”** Even when they *give*, they *give to get*. For this kind of pastor it's **“what's in it for me?”** The phony man of God has ulterior motives.

They **“exalt themselves.”** The false prophets *“swell,”* but they don't *“grow.”* And there's a huge difference. Growth adds

substance and strength to my life. A man inflated, or who *“exalts himself,”* is just full of hot air...

And finally, a false prophet *“strikes you on the face.”* A slap in the face was a first century put down. The false prophets in Corinth manipulated people with insults. They *put people down to keep them in line.*

And here’s the mystery - *why would anyone tolerate these kinds of shenanigans in the name of God?*

Paul was angry at these men passing themselves off as apostles of Christ, but he was also upset with the gullible Corinthians who let them get away with it.

Verse 21, *“To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that!”* Again notice Paul’s sarcasm. His critics had accused him of being weak. Paul replies, *“Well, I’m glad I’m too weak to abuse you in such a brazen way.”*

If the hypocrisy of the false teachers made them seem strong - Paul was happy to be viewed as weak.

“But in whatever anyone is bold - I speak foolishly - I am bold also.” Here Paul wants to match credentials.

Whatever makes the false teachers so confident, he wants to compare resumes. Paul is inferior to no one.

The false apostles had nothing on Paul, and he sets out to prove it in verse 22, *“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.”* Here Paul’s response gives us a clue as to the claims of the false teachers in Corinth.

Apparently, they were Judaizers. These were the infamous, archenemies of the early church. They were Jews who saw

Christianity as a branch of Judaism.

They were okay with faith in Jesus, as long as you were also circumcised a Jew. The Judaizers believed Gentiles first had to become Jews in order to be saved.

Paul opposed their falsehood everywhere he went.

Paul had the perfect Jewish pedigree. A Hebrew - check... An Israelite - check... Of Abraham - check...

Yet none of that mattered. Paul knew it's not what's on your birth certificate that makes you pleasing to God, it's whether you've been born again of His Spirit.

And that happens by faith in Jesus, and faith alone.

Our salvation is a lot like one particular wife's love for her husband. One day her husband asked, "*Honey, did you ever love anyone before me?*" His wife thought a bit, then replied... "*No, darling. I once respected a man for his great intelligence. I admired another man for his remarkable courage. I was captivated by yet another man by his good looks and charm. But with you, darling, well how else can I explain it, except love?*"

Like the wife's attitude toward her husband, God chooses us not because of our brains, or our bravery, or our beauty - *it's grace*. It's only because of His love.

This is why God chose Paul to be an apostle!

And this is what motivated Paul to love the foolish Corinthians. God had put a love in his heart for them.

In 2 Corinthians Paul has reminded his readers of *his jealousy toward them - his generosity to them* - now he grows

bolder, he innumerates *his sufferings for them*.

All he endured to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles!

Understand, every artist has a portfolio - a sample of their work. It's a collection of paintings and drawings.

And by looking through a portfolio you can get a feel for the personality of the artist - their style and skill.

This is what Paul does in the second half of Chapter 11. He reveals his ministry's portfolio. He wants the Corinthians to see what kind of minister he truly was.

Verse 23, "Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool..." Again, Paul recoils at the idea of boasting...

Yet he continues on, "Are they ministers of Christ? I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often..."

Paul begins to lay out his portfolio, but he breaks with convention... Rather than listing his awards, and achievements, and accolades - *showing off the best of Paul* - he lists his numerous sufferings and hardships.

There was a document that circulated through the Roman Empire at the time of Paul. It was entitled, "Res Gestae (reeves just) Divi Augusti" - *pardon my Latin*. It's translated, "The Deeds Of The Divine Augustus."

It was an obituary written for the first emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus. It consisted of a short intro, followed by 35 paragraphs divided into four sections...

First came his political career and advancements.

Second was his public benevolence, or good deeds.

Third chronicled his military triumphs and conquests.

Fourth was a sonnet of Rome's love for its emperor.

Understand, the "Res Gestae" was really just Roman propaganda. It ignored mention of Augustus' struggles and setbacks. It glossed over any blemishes on his record. It's was a promotional tool. It's whole intention was to put a good face on Rome and its emperor.

And here when Paul writes about his ministry you'd think he would fill his portfolio with flattering details...

Paul's Res Gestae might include: *The churches he started... the size of his crowds... the numbers of people converted... the celebrities he reached... the miles he traveled... the Councils he attended... the disputes he settled... the books he wrote... the visions he saw... the money he raised... the pastors he trained and sent out... certainly, the miracles he performed...*

Instead, Paul's validating deeds, his Res Gestae, was filled with the contrary. The Apostle innumerates *his sufferings and setbacks - his hurts and hardships.*

Paul didn't adhere to a false gospel. Obey God and He'll guarantee you health and wealth. To Paul God wasn't a meal ticket. God wasn't a blessing dispenser where you plug in a prayer and out pops an answer.

In fact, the Apostle Paul gloried in weakness, in pain, in struggles for it proved that he served God because he loved Him, not just because he was loved by Him.

Every year, after Thanksgiving, I meet with a group of

Calvary Chapel pastors from the Deep South. Nearly thirty of us gather in east Alabama at Shocco Springs.

We spend three days together. *We fellowship, worship, relax, have fun.* **But we also have rules...**

First, is the Vegas Rule - what goes on at Shocco stays at Shocco. We protect our privacy... Second, no preaching. Since we're all preachers we know when someone is doing it... Third, no bragging... And fourth, the pecking order is determined by **scars** and **years**.

In any group there's a pecking order - who's the leader, who's respected, who's a newbie, etc. etc...

A pastor having lots of people doesn't mean much. There're multiple ways to draw a crowd. You can get naked, or set yourself on fire, folks will come to watch.

Having a nice facility means you're affluent, not necessarily spiritual. Brick and mortar isn't a big deal.

What the pastors in our group respect are the scars a man carries - what it cost him to follow Jesus. **And** how long he has survived - his longevity also matters.

This was more like the criteria Paul used to judge the faithfulness of a man's ministry - *scars* and *struggles*.

When the troops of Alexander the Great mutinied in 324 BC, the General gave a speech. "*Which of you has labored more for me than I did for him? Come now! Whoever of you has wounds, let him strip and show them, and I will show mine in turn; for there is no part of my body free from wounds; nor is there any kind of weapon used, the traces of which I do not bear on my person. The sword, arrows, missiles projected*

from engines of war; stones and bolts of wood, yet I am still leading you as conquerors over all the land and sea.”

Before Alexander it was fashionable for Greek men to have soft skin. But he set the trend for rugged exteriors. His scars were proof of his leadership, and courage, and commitment to his troops. And this is why Chapter 11 endears us to Paul. It shows off his scars.

You think you've suffered for Jesus sake?

Listen again to the intro to Paul's Res Gestae, verse 23, *“in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often...”*

And what all is in these pregnant phrases, we have no idea... Notice, Paul says, *“in prisons”* plural.

In Acts we have record of Paul being jailed just once, Acts 16 in Philippi. Yet here he mentions he was jailed multiple times. It was a frequent occurrence.

And realize Roman prisons didn't have TVs, beds, hot meals, and ping-pong tables. They were caves and basements. Rat-infested. Always damp and dark. The only bathroom was a bucket in the corner. If a friend didn't bring food to the prison, you didn't eat that day.

Understand, when God called Paul to a town to minister, jail time was part of his expectation.

When I'm asked to speak at another church, or at a pastors conference - in addition to the impact of bringing God's Word, I leave thinking... *a short flight, a pick-up at the airport, a nice venue, a large group, cool music, a comfortable hotel, a generous honorarium.*

But when Paul was called to a visit a new city with the Gospel - in addition to bringing God's Word - he was wondering *what will the prison be like? How many lashes will the beating require? And yet Paul obeyed!*

And what does he mean here by *"labors" "in deaths often."* Paul was like a cat with nine lives. How many times did he barely escape death - *we don't know.*

In verse 24, *"From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one."* This was the punishment of the synagogue. When a Jew was guilty of blasphemy, his cloak was ripped from his back, and he was subjected to the lash - 39 times with a cat-of-nine-tails.

One Jewish source said: A third to the back. A third on the right shoulder. And a third on the left shoulder.

Deuteronomy 25 stipulated 40 lashes. But if the forty were exceeded, the torturer would receive the same punishment, so he always stopped at 39 - just to make sure no one got carried away or somehow lost count.

And five times Paul endured this beating. That's a total of 195 lashes. Imagine Paul when he took off his shirt, there were criss-crossed scars everywhere!

How long does it take to recover from such an ordeal? Did his wounds get infected? How did he manage the pain? And this happened to him five times!

If it were me I would've started skipping the synagogue - going to straight to the Gentiles. *I don't need another beating,* but not Paul. He loved the Jews. The Gospel was to the Jew first... and Paul obeyed.

He adds, “Three times I was beaten with rods...” This was the Roman torture. Administered with a bamboo cane, there were no limits to this punishment. It was totally left up to the discretion of the local authorities.

The book of Acts never mentions Paul’s 195 lashes, and only once does it record a Roman beating, Acts 16. Paul endured *this* torture on two more occasions.

He says, “Once I was stoned...” This is mentioned in Acts 14. It happened in Galatia, at the town of Lystra.

Paul was the victim of the violence of a flash mob. False teachers convinced the locals he was the enemy. The mob pelted him with rocks and left him for dead.

Years later when he wrote to the Galatians (6:17) he mentions *his scars* as proof of his love for them and his faithfulness to the Gospel. Realize, in Paul’s mind, this was his finest hour - *not on top the world, honored by men* - but under a pile of stones for Jesus sake.

He tells us, “Three times I was shipwrecked...” Only one shipwreck is mentioned in Acts - Chapter 27 - and at this point in the timeline it has yet to occur.

Obviously, Paul is speaking of three other disasters.

Flimsy wooden vessels, sudden storms, and poor navigation made sea-travel in the first century a risky business... *just ask Paul*. Every time the boat he was on drifted from the dock, he didn’t know if he’d ever set foot on dry land again - or if he’d end up shark-bait.

Yet Paul criss-crossed thousands of miles across the

Mediterranean world to spread the Gospel of Jesus.

He mentions one trip, “A night and a day I have been in the deep...” He stayed afloat once for 24 hours, treading water - holding on to a broken timber. He kicked away the fish that were nibbling on his legs.

He was “in journeys often...” Imagine the stamps in Paul’s passport. The frequent flyer miles he logged.

“In perils of waters...” Paul not only crossed seas, he swam through rivers and drudge along in swamps.

“In perils of robbers...” Remember, Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan? It starts with robbers ambushing a traveler on the windy road from Jericho to Jerusalem.

There were few state troopers in the first century. It made travel of any sort a dangerous proposition.

“In perils of my own countrymen (that is the Jews), in perils of the Gentiles (that’s everybody else). Paul was an equal opportunity target. Everybody attacked him.

“In perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren...”

In short, Paul encountered opposition from all sides.

The life God called Paul to live for the Gospel sake was extreme and difficult, and full of a million perils.

Paul endured *persecution from the enemy*, but he also suffered from the *execution of his ministry...*

He says, “in weariness and toil...” Think of his 18 months in Corinth. *By day* he worked with Aquila and Priscilla in their

tent-making business, while *by night* he taught the Scriptures in the synagogue and homes.

No time off - no vacation - he pressed on for Jesus' sake "*in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness...*" Hey, the prisons in Paul's day didn't have orange jumpsuits for their inmates... When you were shipwrecked and plucked from the sea the Red Cross wasn't standing by to drape you in a blanket...

There were all kinds of situations where Paul found himself shivering and naked - famished and thirsty...

In fact, the early church father, John Chrysostom, who lived in the 4th century, much closer to NT times, in writing of 2 Corinthians 11, commented that he believed Paul didn't tell *the half* of all that he suffered for Jesus sake. He endured far more than he told us.

Do you get a sense of what this man's life was like? When you have a bad day, read this chapter, it'll cheer you up! *At least your life is not as rough as Paul's...*

And yet Paul writes the most lofty theology in the Bible. He lived in deep communion with God. He possessed unquenchable joy and inexhaustible love.

He had faith to see his trials as "*light afflictions.*"

Paul could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. He pressed on to know Jesus...

So what's our excuse? We get a headache and can't come to church. Someone else can usher today... are we serious? In light of Paul, we all can buck up a little.

And to top it all off - here's the icing on the cake that was Paul's ministry, verse 28 reads, "besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." This was Paul's most relentless stress. Not the perils, or robbers, or prisons, or labors..

His greatest stress was his care for the churches.

Here's what dominated Paul's thoughts - filled up his waking hours - kept him up at night... it was the daily concern he carried for the spiritual health of the churches he planted, and essentially still pastored.

There were so many ways for these churches to go sideways. *Some were immature, some were filled with false doctrine, some were divided, some were carnal, some were preyed upon by wolves in sheep's clothing.*

And Paul cared about them all. *He paid visits. He wrote letters. He sent representatives...* If it were today Paul would text, and tweet, and post, and Facebook.

And certainly, *most importantly*, Paul prayed.

All his other cares were secondary issues, compared to the "deep concern" Paul had for the many churches.

The language in verse 28 is so description. When Paul writes, "what comes upon me daily" think of someone being smothered under a blanket. It speaks of "an intolerable load - something you can't shake off."

And as a pastor, here's where *I can* relate to Paul.

For though I drink my coffee in the morning - *with cream and sweetener* - and I sit on a comfortable couch, in my climate-

controlled living room - I too am concerned for the people and the church I pastor.

Even on my day off, I'm really not off - I still think of you - this church - as well as, other churches with which I'm affiliated. CC is *"my deep concern."*

Some of you might be aware of what's gone in within Calvary Chapel nationally. One of the pastors branched off to start a new association with a different emphasis. For the first time in thirty years the unity we've enjoyed in Calvary Chapel is now in question.

As a CC pastor, and a CC Council member, this grieves me. I've worked hard to respond appropriately.

A few weeks ago a group of pastors were posting on a private blog and criticizing how we as leaders in CC could let such a thing happen. I wrote them, *"This has not been easy on any of us. It has taken a toll on me personally. My pastor asked me to take a seat at the table... Perhaps some of you could have done a better job. It seems you think so. But I have taken this responsibility seriously and am doing my best. To think any of us would approach this flippantly is insulting."*

A fellow pastor should know the *"deep concern"* God's Spirit puts into a pastor's heart for the church. And recently, I've felt this concern as never before!

In verse 29 Paul writes, *"Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?"* Paul cared for the weak and fragile, since he saw himself as one of them. Paul too was needy.

Thus, when someone weak in the faith was taken

advantage of, or caused to stumble, Paul got angry.

He wasn't afraid to defend a weaker believer.

Paul wraps up his portfolio, or his “**Res Gestae** (reeves justi)” by stating in verse 30, “**If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.**”

The proof of his ministry's legitimacy wasn't its attendance *stats* or its bank *statements*, but its *scars*.

Paul didn't point to his *stars*, but to his *scars*.

Paul closes with his own CCSM story, “**The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.**” The build up here makes you assume he's going to bring up a miracle.

Paul is going to brag about some supernatural feat, so he calls on God to assure us that he's not lying...

You figure, Paul is going to tell a story that sounds too good to be true. We'll want to google it and check it out later. *What great exploit will validate his ministry?*

Here it is, “**In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.**”

Wait, what does Paul pull out off his portfolio to demonstrate the faithfulness of his ministry?

How do you top off a resume'? *Peaching in Athens? Planting churches in Asia? Converting Caesar's own household?...* Well, how about **sneaking out of town!**

Paul was lower in a basket from a wall in Damascus. The

Apostle left town not to a ticker-tape parade, but in a clandestine escape. *He went out with the trash.*

This won't be the picture on his promotional packet!

But here's his point... the false teachers in Corinth said God chose them because of their exceptional talents and righteousness. *Paul said just the opposite...*

According to worldly criteria and human standards Paul was nothing special. He was weak and needy - yet God in His grace chose him to do mighty things!

Here's the lesson for us - **follow the man who depends on God's grace, not the proud man who boasts in himself.** When it comes to the pastor who loves the spotlight, as Mr. T would say, **"pity the fool."**

Paul lived his life to bring God glory! *So should we.*