

Christian Conduct and Suffering for the Sake of Christ

2 Corinthians 11

*2 Corinthians 11: "Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. **2** For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. **3** But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. **4** For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! **5** For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. **6** Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. **7** Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? **8** I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. **9** And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. **10** As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. **11** Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! **12** But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. **13** For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. **14** And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. **15** Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. **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. **17** What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. **18** Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. **19** For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! **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. **21** 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. **22** Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. **23** 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. **24** From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. **25** 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; **26** 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; **27** in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— **28** besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. **29** Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? **30** If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. **31** The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is*

blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

Background Notes

One of Paul's purposes in writing 2 Corinthians was to defend his apostolic authority. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul claimed that he, like the other apostles, had actually seen the Lord. And in the first verse of both 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul claimed to having been made an apostle by the will of God.

So, in no uncertain terms, Paul claimed that he was an apostle! However, some false-teaching Judaizers had come to Corinth from Jerusalem, and they were undermining Paul's teaching and his apostolic authority. In fact, they were saying that they had more of a claim to apostleship than Paul did! They probably claimed this because they were approved by those who were Judaizers in the "mother church" in Jerusalem.

While some of the Judaizers were true believers (as we saw in 10:7), the Judaizers that Paul had in mind in this chapter were definitely not believers. Look at verses 13-15, and notice that Paul referred to these false apostles as "servants of Satan." He said that their destiny would be according to their deeds - certainly a description of unbelievers.

By the way, don't form your doctrine of Satan based on "cartoon theology"! Satan is not a red-colored creature with horns and a pitchfork. Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light! He can carry a Bible! He can appear to be a "minister of righteousness" - but it's all a mask to hide his deceit and false teaching.

Doctrinal Points

1. There is a time and place to defend your Christian conduct.

In this chapter Paul wasn't bragging about his outstanding record of Christian service to make points with the Corinthians. No. He was defending his Christian conduct, and he only did so because the "false apostles" had slandered him. Paul defended his conduct, not so much for the record, but for the work of the Lord in Corinth.

Paul was afraid that the Corinthian church, as the Bride of Christ, was being deceived just as Satan deceived Eve. Paul feared that the false apostles were leading the Corinthian believers astray. Verses 2-3: *"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."*

These so-called “super-apostles” were bringing false teaching into the church. To stop it and correct it, Paul had to prove to the Corinthians that he was a true apostle by the will of God, and that the Judaizers were false apostles. The approach Paul took here was not his normal approach. It’s not the normal approach for us, either - but there is a time and place for us to defend our Christian conduct if we have been falsely accused.

Paul even considered it foolishness that he was “boasting” about his conduct in order to defend himself. *“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly”(v1).* Paul was following the practical advice of Proverbs 26:5: *“Answer a fool as his folly deserves.”*

Paul contrasted himself with the false apostles in order to defend himself. Paul was not as skilled in speech as they were, but he surpassed them in knowledge (v6). They exalted themselves; Paul humbled himself (v7). They charged for their services; Paul supported himself and the Lord’s work at Corinth by working, and through gifts from other churches (v7-9). Paul was able to defend his Christian conduct because no questions could be raised about it.

Can the same be said of us? Or would we have a hard time defending our Christian conduct? What about in the area of humility? What about in the area of how we handle our money? Let’s hope no questions could ever be raised about our Christian conduct. There is a time and place to defend your Christian conduct.

2. There is a time and place to share your Christian experience.

We’ve all read or heard Christian testimonies in which the speakers or writers have brought more attention to themselves than to the glory of God. We all need to be careful of this problem of pride. But there is a time and place to share your Christian experience, because your Christian testimony and your Christian experience can bring glory to God.

In the second half of chapter 11, Paul shared a number of the situations he had experienced since he became a Christian. Some of these experiences are recorded in the book of Acts. For example, in Acts 9 we read about Paul escaping from Damascus by being let down over the city wall in a basket, and that experience is mentioned here in verses 32-33. In Acts 14 we read that Paul was almost stoned to death at Lystra, and that experience is recorded here in verse 25.

But many of the situations described here are not mentioned in the book of Acts, and without 2 Corinthians 11 there would be quite a gap in our knowledge of the Paul’s experiences in serving the Lord. By the way, any time you think you’re carrying a heavy cross of suffering for the Lord, read this chapter about Paul’s experiences - and be humbled!

Paul shared all these experiences to contrast himself with the false apostles. They were boasting about their credentials, and the foolish Corinthians were impressed with this approach (v19-20). So Paul, with much irony and sarcasm, decided

to do a little boasting himself - to show that the false apostles didn't even come close to Paul when it came to credentials! Paul was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (v22, and also Philippians 3:15).

Paul emphasized his experiences of suffering to show that, in contrast to the false apostles, he was identifying with the sufferings of Christ, and they were not. These false apostles were more like the "health-and-wealth" preachers of today. By sharing his experiences of suffering, Paul was teaching that such "health-and-wealth" teaching is wrong. **Suffering** for the sake of Christ was the **norm** for Christian experience then and it is today as well. There is a time and place to share your Christian experience.

Practical Application

Be skeptical about a so-called "being of light."

A number of people who claim to have gone through "near death" experiences have reported seeing a "being of light," and they assume this "being" is Jesus. I'd be skeptical about assuming that a "being of light" is Jesus, especially in view of 2 Corinthians 11:14. This verse warns us that Satan can deceptively transform himself into an "angel of light."

Furthermore, some of the "near death" folks who are not Christians have reported that the "being of light" told them that there is nothing for people to worry about when they die. It's all light and bliss **for everyone** at the end of the tunnel. That idea certainly doesn't line up with the teaching of the Bible. (In fact, many of the experiences these people report do not line up with the teaching of the Bible.) Satan transforms himself into an angel of light in order to **deceive!**

So be skeptical about reports of any so-called "being of light" – and any other information reported from supposed "near-death" experiences. Check to make sure any of these "revelations of the after-life" line up with Scripture!