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2 Corinthians 11
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By Dan Maines

2 Corinthians 11

2 Corinthians 11:1

I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are bearing with me.

† Paul prepares to boast reluctantly, calling it "foolishness."

† He appeals to the Corinthians' patience as he defends his apostleship.

2 Corinthians 11:2-3

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his trickery, your minds will be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

† Paul's jealousy is protective, not selfish, desiring their loyalty to Christ alone.

† He fears false teachers may corrupt them as the serpent did Eve.

† Irenaeus (Against Heresies 5.23.2) compared false teachers to the serpent's deception.

2 Corinthians 11:4

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, this you tolerate very well!

† Paul rebukes the Corinthians for tolerating false gospels.

† False Christs and false spirits threaten the church.

2 Corinthians 11:5-6

For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. 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.

† Paul admits his lack of eloquence but emphasizes true knowledge of Christ.

† Knowledge of the gospel outweighs rhetorical skill.

† Lucian of Samosata often mocked Christian preachers as poor speakers, showing how critics judged by style, not truth.

2 Corinthians 11:7-9

Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be

exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you, and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for when the brothers came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

† Paul preached freely in Corinth, supported by other churches.

† His sacrifice was for their spiritual exaltation.

† Clement of Rome (1 Clement 5) remembered Paul's sacrifices for the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:10-12

As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! But what I am doing I will also continue to do, so that I may eliminate the opportunity from those who want an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.

† Paul boasts in his integrity, refusing to exploit the Corinthians.

† He exposes false apostles who boasted for selfish gain.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

† Paul unmasks false apostles as servants of Satan.

† Outward appearance may deceive, but judgment reveals truth.

† The Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 4.23) also describe spirits of deceit masquerading as light.

2 Corinthians 11:16-18

Again I say, no one is to think me foolish, but if you do, accept me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little. What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.

† Paul stoops to the level of his opponents by boasting, though he calls it foolishness.

† He contrasts fleshly boasting with true boasting in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:19-21

For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours you, if anyone takes advantage of you, if anyone exalts himself, if anyone hits you in the face. To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison.

† Paul uses irony to expose their tolerance of abusive leaders.

† True apostleship is marked by humility and service, not domination.

2 Corinthians 11:22-23

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane, I more so, in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.

† Paul matches his opponents' claims, then surpasses them in suffering for Christ.

† His apostleship is proven by endurance, not status.

2 Corinthians 11:24-27

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea. I

have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers, I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

† Paul's suffering catalog proves his authenticity.

† Josephus (Wars 2.14.9) described similar perils in travel, giving historical context to Paul's hardships.

2 Corinthians 11:28-29

Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?

† Beyond physical trials, Paul carried constant care for the churches.

† His love made him share in their weakness and struggles.

2 Corinthians 11:30-31

If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

† Paul boasts only in weakness, for weakness reveals God's strength.

2 Corinthians 11:32-33

In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

† Paul recalls his humiliating escape from Damascus, proof that his ministry began in weakness.

† Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History 2.1) noted Paul's early sufferings, showing his humility and perseverance.

How it applies to us today

† 2 Corinthians 11 teaches that true apostleship is proven by suffering, humility, and faithfulness, not outward show.

† False teachers may appear as light, but their fruits expose them.

† The church must discern truth from deception, holding fast to Christ alone.

† Like Paul, we boast only in weakness, that Christ's strength may be revealed.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.23.2 - false teachers compared to the serpent

† Lucian of Samosata - mockery of Christian preachers' speech

† Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 5 - Paul's sacrifices remembered

† Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QS 4.23 - spirits of deceit appearing as light

† Josephus, Wars 2.14.9 - dangers of travel in Paul's era

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2.1 - Paul's early sufferings

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