

## **Dr. Ayo Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 12, 2 Corinthians 11, Paul's Foolish Boasting**

© 2024 Ayo Adewuya and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Ayo Adewuya in his teaching on 2 Corinthians. This is session 12, 2 Corinthians 11, Paul's Foolish Boasting.

Now we come to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 where Paul begins his foolish boasting.

Just as a reminder, Paul's opponents in Corinth, as we've seen, were proud as well as pretentious. They claimed to be superior to Paul, and they entered the community and propagated some false teachings. As a result, they undermined Paul's authority, who was the founder of the Corinthian church. Now, they not only boasted but also boasted and begged some of the believers at Corinth.

A few had listened to these false claims and, in so doing, were endangering their spiritual well-being. The spiritual welfare of the church at this point was at stake, and Paul had to take whatever actions or steps needed to be taken in order to salvage these Corinthian Christians from the adverse influence of false teachers. Therefore, Paul was forced to boast not because of pride in accomplishment but rather because of his jealous affection for the church.

He loved them, and he wanted their love in return. So, we actually see this foolish boasting all the way, extending to chapter 12, verse 13. So, from 11:1 to 12:13, we'll be taking these chapter by chapter.

So, we'll be looking at chapter 11 here. Here, Paul begins the sharpest polemic to be found in any of his writings. What he does is that he wields masterfully the weapon of irony tempered by the truth of the gospel.

He said the catchword boast, which we find in 10, 12, and 18, continues here. So Paul's boast becomes more specific and thus more dangerous in light of what is just written because he has just said in chapter 10, verse 17 that he who wants to boast in the Lord. But in the beginning, he tells them to endure his foolish boasting.

He said he wanted them to endure his foolishness. He was going to boast a little bit, and he said that again in verses 16 to 21. Reluctantly, he boasted and said I don't want to do it, but I'm going to do it because you are the ones who wanted to know, and I want to tell you, but you see when I do it, I just become a fool.

Paul's boast, however, is not an empty one because he was not in any way inferior to them. So, he tells them to endure his boasting in verses 1 to 4, and he tells them he's not inferior to them in verses 5 to 15. Then, in 16 to 21, he asked for endurance

again, and following this extended introduction, Paul now begins the proper boasting in chapter 11, the last part of verse 21 to chapter 12, verse 10.

He began to boast in his lineage, in his sufferings, and in the personal revelations, and all these he ultimately sums up in a declaration of his likeness to his crucified and risen Lord by saying when I am weak, then I am strong. Then, in a concluding epilogue, although admitting the foolishness of his boasting, he presents his actual conduct in chapter 12, verses 11 to 13, as the basis upon which he has demonstrated the authenticity of his apostleship. So looking at chapter 11 we want to look at chapter 11.

I wish that you will bear with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are bearing with me, 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 chaste or pure virgin. 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.

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, 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. Or did I commit a sin in 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, I was in need.

I was not a burden to anyone. For when the brethren came for Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you. I will continue to do so.

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 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, for such men are false apostles, deceitful walkers, 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. Again, I say, let no one

think me foolish. But if you do, receive 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. For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly.

For you tolerate it, if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. To my shame, I must say that we have been weak by comparison. But in whatever respect anyone else is bold, I speak in foolishness.

I am just as bold myself. 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 am also in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.

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 are spent in the deep. 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 on the sea, dangers among false brethren.

I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 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? 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. In Damascus, the ethnic 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. We'll read up to verse 10 in chapter 12 because it goes together.

Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who, 14 years ago, whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows. Such a man was caught up to the third heaven, and I know how such a man, whether in the body or apart from the body, I do not know, God knows, was caught up into paradise and had inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

On behalf of such a man, I will boast, but on my own behalf, I will not boast except in regard to my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast, I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth, but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me. Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from exalting myself.

Concerning this, I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me, and he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I would rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong.

So, you see a long section devoted to Paul's boasting. So, following his extended introduction, Paul boasts from 11:21b to 12:10. He boasts in almost everything.

You see, ironically, Paul imitates his opponents in a form of self-commendation. That's the irony. Paul really boasts in Christ, his Lord.

The contradiction between the fool's mask of his boasting and his actual boast in his ministry gives the whole passage a very unique literary charm and captivating force. That's why we read the whole thing, even though we're looking at it chapter by chapter. But you get the sense of Paul boasting.

More significantly, as we read through, you probably have noticed that it reveals Paul's weakness in his sufferings and the nature of his visions and revelations from the Lord. These admissions came as a result of a struggle with opposition at Corinth. You see, without what we've just read, we would have missed Paul's power in weakness testimony.

But because they forced him and they forced it out of him, we understand what exactly to have power in weakness. He went through all the sufferings, and yet the power of God was manifested through him. You see, with all of chapters 10 to 13, the rhetorical character we've said earlier on remains as forensic or judicial rhetoric.

And you are looking at the full speech. The Forensic rhetoric, which is like a court of law, dominates as Paul defends his apostolic authority again and, thereby, his gospel with a strong emotional appeal. That's what Paul is doing right here as he begins to boast.

Here, Paul gives reasons for having this feeling and describes the strategy he adopted to deal with the problem in Corinth. Forced to boast by the tactics of his enemies, Paul shows their allegations are false by indulging himself in a little foolishness. That's what he calls it in 11:1. He has the Corinthians to bear with him in his foolishness and is confident that they will.

Paul calls the defense of his apostleship folly because he knows that the things he believed to be honorable about the apostleship will be regarded as foolish by some of the detractors in Corinth. Let's look at this section. Number one, we begin verses 11 to 6, which is an appeal by Paul for the Corinthians to bear with his foolishness.

Here, at the start, Paul introduces an awkward type of self-defense altogether. He begins, he said I hope, I wish, you will put up with a little of my foolishness. You see, this is what has been called by some an anticipatory apology for what Paul was going to say.

He was going to apologize. Okay, please bear with me. This is what I want to say.

So, Paul requests that the Corinthians bear with him in a little foolishness. Bear with me a little of my foolishness. You see, the word foolishness is rooted in the Old Testament wisdom tradition.

You see it in Job chapter 1 verse 22, Proverbs chapter 9, or Isaiah chapter 35. Paul utilizes it now to inform his audience that he's playing the fool. It's not because he's foolish.

You need to be able to separate both. He's not foolish, but he's playing the fool. He's coming; he's mocking his opponents by imitating, in the sense of what you call a parody, their indulgence in self-praise.

So, Paul is boasting. Paul's boasting is a little foolishness. He hopes they will be able to see through and continue to put up with it to their profit.

He said, do bear with me. Do bear with me. Then, in verses 2 to 4, Paul offers three reasons, motivating his request that they should bear with him.

And each reason is introduced with the particle *gar*, which means for. Each reason is introduced, which is not always clearly evident in the translation. I mean, but in the Greek, it's translated with *gar*, for this reason.

For this reason, in verses 2 and 3, beginning with the boasting in verses 2 and 3, what is the first reason? It says here, for I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband so that Christ so that to Christ I might present

you as a pure virgin. But I'm afraid that as a serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

So, he began by telling them that he had presented them to Christ. It began by saying, I'm motivated by a godly jealousy. The reason he wanted to boast was godly jealousy because, let's put it this way, the Corinthians were becoming what we will call a kind of endangered species at this point.

They were being endangered. Their faith was in danger of being subverted. So, Paul says, I'm jealous over you with a godly jealousy, which is very, very important.

And then that's in verse 4. The church was willing to accept those who came to them with a message that was contrary to what Paul had brought to them. And so, Paul says, this is the reason I want to boast. I want you to be able to differentiate between me and them.

These people are brought a different message altogether from what I preach to you. And I want you to be able to see through that they are not the same thing. This is another gospel that they are bringing to you.

Then, number three, he wanted to in verse 5 because he said, I am not inferior even to the eminent apostles. I'm not imminent. I mean, to the eminent apostles, look at it in verse 5, for I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.

So, there are three important reasons. Number one, godly jealousy. Number two, another gospel.

If you remember that same phrase in Galatians chapter one, it says, if some people come to you and preach another gospel, which is not another, another gospel, another gospel, which another in that sense, another, which is different, which is not another of the same kind, which we preach to you. So, it's another of a different kind altogether. You see it very clearly.

If one comes to you and preaches another Jesus, whom we have not preached. So, the first motivation for Paul's plea for the Corinthians to tolerate his foolishness flows from his godly jealousy. He shares a very, very same deep concern for them that God has for them.

It's like, look, God is concerned about you. And I'm also concerned about you. So, I'm boasting because I am concerned about you the same way that God is concerned.

You see, the idea of origin is not far from what I mean; when you look at the grammar here, the idea of God is not far at all. The jealousy God himself possesses. You see, some people have a problem with that.

When you hear that God is jealous, your own jealousy, human jealousy, is not the same thing as people's jealousy. People are jealous of one another because of what they have. Jealousy and envy: the kind of jealousy we're talking about is not jealousy that does not want you to have what you have or envy.

I want to have, it's not only that I don't want you to have what you have. I want to have what you have. That's human jealousy and envy.

That's not the kind of jealousy God is talking about. God loves us passionately, and he wants us to be his exclusive property. He loves us.

I mean, you read it in several passages of the scriptures in Exodus chapter 20, verse five, it says, thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them. For I, the Lord thy God, I'm a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children onto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. And of course, in chapter 34, verse 14, he said, for thou shall worship no other God for the Lord God, for the Lord whose name is a jealous God.

And of course, in Ezekiel chapter 23, verse 35, verse 25, and I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal furiously with thee. They shall take away thy nose and thy ears, and thy remnant shall fall by the sword. They shall take thy sons and thy daughters, and the residue shall be devoured by the fire.

We've read all those passages so that you can see that the kind of jealousy that Paul has in mind is the same kind of jealousy that God has for his people. You see, whatever the precise nuance may be, Paul's point is very clear: in some strong, more than merely human sense, God is ultimately involved in his depth of feeling for the church at Corinth. As lovers seem to be out of their wits, Paul plays the fool here.

And here he says, I've espoused you to one husband. I'm jealous over you with godly jealousy because I have promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I may present you as a pure virgin to him. Now, let's come back to this again.

This is a holiness language right here in this passage. I have promised you this word is also used only once in the New Testament and only here. And it means to bring into close association, to join.

It is used here for betrothal in the context of traditional Jewish marriage customs. You see, the background of Paul's imagery is the Old Testament. Israel's prophets frequently picture God as the bridegroom of his people.

You see that in Isaiah chapter 50, verses 1 to 2. Thus said the Lord, where is the bill of your mother's divorcement whom I put away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I've sold you? Behold, for your iniquities, you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away. Verse 2, wherefore when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot be redeemed? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke, I dry up the sea. I make the rivers a wilderness.

Their fish stinketh because there is no water, and dies for thirst. So that's the background. Israel is God's bride, and this figure illustrates the nature of the covenant between God and Israel, and Jesus himself spoke often about the Messianic consummation in terms of the marriage feast.

We can't go into all the references, but you know the story very well in Matthew chapter 22, and of course the story of the ten virgins in Matthew chapter 25, and you remember that one very well, where five were wise and five were otherwise. I call them five wise, five otherwise. They were otherwise, they were foolish.

We call them foolish. So, you remember that language of marriage. Then in Ephesians chapter 5, a person that is well known very well.

So, Paul uses the marriage analogy of marriage for the entire Corinthian church as the bride of Christ regarded corporately and as representative of all believers. Paul says, I have betrothed you, which means an exclusive relationship that admits to no other external relationships. So according to Jewish custom, we understand that betrothal was a formal contract in which the engaged couple were legally husband and wife, although there was a year's interval before the wedding festivities.

Only at that time will the woman leave the parents' house to take up domestic and sexual relations in her husband's home, and now Paul says, I have betrothed you to one husband. I have godly jealousy, and that husband is Christ. You know what that means? No rivals can be tolerated.

I think we believers need to hear that today. Let's put it in the words of Jesus. Jesus said no one can serve two masters.

If you want to serve one, you will hate the other, and he used it as well in the context of money. You cannot be a servant of mammon and be a servant of the Lord. We need to understand that we are exclusively God's possessions.



All that believers would understand today, again, and think about it, is that no rivals can be tolerated. If we say Jesus is Lord indeed, then there cannot be any other Lord. I do remember we used to have this proverb back at home in Africa that you never have two kings reigning over a town at the same time.

You only have a king reigning over a town over a city at the same time, and of course, you understand you really don't have two presidents ruling over a nation at the same time. It's just one president at a time. If you have two, then there's a problem right there in that nation, or if you have two mayors over a particular city, then there's a problem, and it translates that to Christianity.

You can't have Jesus as your Lord and then have your allegiance to another Lord, and Paul is saying, wait a minute, if I am your father in the gospel, if I am the one who founded this church, you can't just turn your loyalty right now to somebody else. Number one, you can't turn away from Christ. Number two, I am your apostle.

So, he had to boast, you see, but listen, Paul's singular point is the preservation of the chastity of the bride. He said I've betrothed you to one husband. This is a language of holiness.

As Chrysostom notes in the world, a woman is a virgin before her marriage when she loses her virginity, but in the need in the church, those who were anything but virgins before they turn to Christ acquire virginity in him. As a result, the whole church is a virgin. I mean, it says pure virgin.

It uses the language of holiness again, *hagion*, that's the word he uses here, which he uses, pure, clean, and we are saying that holiness is very important. The bride of Christ must live lives that are pleasing to God. In keeping with that figure, the marital consummation at which Paul is to present Christian to Christ as a pure virgin is no doubt the day of Messianic fulfillment.

That is very clear, as we see in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 from verses 1 to 10. Then, in verse 3, moved by his responsibility for his spiritual children in Corinth, Paul is convinced that the intruders present a serious threat to their faith. His ministry in Corinth may come to nothing with dire consequences for the Christians there, so he's afraid of pastoral fear.

Such fear is not only contrary to love, someone will say, but a property of love. Such fear is a property of love. He loved them.

He was jealous over them. This is not just a kind of being possessive. No, not at all.

Paul was afraid that, just as Eve was, they may be completely deceived, and Paul doesn't want that to happen because their minds may be corrupted. Look at it. I'm afraid that as a serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

He wants them. He wants them to be very careful. He likens himself to a father who gives his daughter to a future husband in betrothal and at the wedding.

He's preaching the gospel in Corinth, and the people's response to salvation is analogous to the betrothal act. By his ministry, Paul espoused the Corinthian believers to one husband, to Jesus Christ. He also anticipates the time when he will present them as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Meanwhile, he's anxious to safeguard their purity. And that of the believers who came from Macedonia, probably bearing gifts from Philippi, he declares emphatically that in everything, he kept himself from being a burden to his readers and will continue to do so. You see, the church has the same problem today.

It is not a surprise that there are false teachers in the church today. We don't have to name anyone. We know them.

Christians of this generation, like Christians of many generations, will have to answer to Jesus for their lack of discernment when it comes to the false teachers and leaders accepted and embraced by the church. We need to be careful. And then you see Paul going on right in verse 5. I think that I'm not in the least inferior to the super-apostles.

For the first time, he seems to refer to them now. He calls them super-apostles. I mean, these are not just false apostles.

They are called super apostles. Christians should be very, very careful. He said I'm not in the least inferior.

The question then is, who are the super-apostles? I mean, the idea of super apostles has generated a lot of questions and discussions. When you read the NRSV and the NIV, it identifies them with Paul's opponents in verse 4. Other interpreters prefer the common casual force. Others argue that Paul's reference to the most eminent apostles intends the pillar apostles or simply the 12th, both here and in 12:1. Now, there are different arguments for those.

But maybe if the second interpretation is correct, Paul is comparing himself here, not with the opposing false apostles, which means there's a difference between false

apostles and super-apostles. If there's a difference, then the false apostles will be the ones teaching errors. The super-apostles will be the pillars of the church.

I mean, there are many arguments in that regard, regardless of what it is. Paul is saying he is not inferior. It's not inferior to them.

If the second interpretation is correct, that is, we're talking about the pillars in the church, the early apostles or the 12th or both together, it means that Paul was talking about the original apostles. And Paul says I am not inferior to any of those. In other words, I can stand my ground the way the other apostles can stand their ground.

I am not inferior to the super-apostles. We need to be very careful when we understand what Paul is saying: look, I know who I am. I am called to be an apostle of Christ.

Then, immediately in verse six, he qualifies his accession with a concession, and then a new accession is introduced by an even if. Look at verse six in chapter 11, verse six. You see here that even if I'm unskilled in speech, I am not so in knowledge. In fact, in every way, we've made this evident to you in all things.

Even if I am not a trained speaker, that's what it means. It means that he's untrained but not unskilled. Then he asserts with emphatic double all that he's not an idiot.

He's not an amateur in knowledge. Therefore, he can boast in the same way, and nobody should berate him or look at him to say that he's not important. You see, the rationale for the foolishness Paul feels he must indulge in confronts us today with our stewardship of the gospel of Christ.

Like Paul, we all should be fully cognizant and aware of our human limitations. We should be fully cognizant and aware of our human limitations. And, of course, we should be confident in our conviction of divine truth in the gospel.

And lastly, we should be concerned for the spiritual welfare of those to whom we minister in the faith. All these are important as we're looking at Paul's boasting. Then, beginning from verse seven, Paul now talks about his self-support.

Paul's practice of preaching the gospel without charge must have been a real blow to Paul's enemies who were motivated by a mercenary spirit. And you have these cynical preachers who went around collecting money. And apart from that, like we said earlier on, manual labor to some of the opponents of Paul was beneath any apostolic dignity or status.

And therefore, Paul, as a leather worker, undermines his own apostolic authority. Secondly, Paul was violating the conventions of patronage and clientele by refusing to take money from them. He refused to be a client to them.

He did not want to put himself in a situation where the Corinthians would have authority and control over him. But here is the issue. Paul himself agreed.

The Macedonians met his needs. If the Macedonians met his needs, why is he refusing their own support? Which means he does not love them. So, the self-appointed apostles who had invited the church at Corinth did accept pay for their services.

They were accepting pay, but Paul was not accepting. So, what did they do? They used this fact to denigrate Paul in the minds of his Corinthian converts. How could Paul simply ignore the Lord's command that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel? So, to them, Paul was actually violating his own words that he quoted in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 14.

Now, if those who preach and teach well in the church are worthy to be paid, according to 1 Timothy 5, verses 17-18, was Paul then unworthy? So, the apostle draws a clear contrast between his motives and the motives of those he calls false apostles in verses 13-15. You see, Paul's preaching the gospel without charge must have been a real blow to his enemies, his opponents, who were motivated by mercenary spray from a practical point of view. It may have revealed their true colors more than anything else.

Paul is determined to continue exposing them by his own policy. Appealing to the truth that was in him, the apostle expresses his determination not to be stopped by boasting of his policy in Achaia. You see that in verse 10.

Why? Is it because he does not love the Corinthians as his opponents have charged? No. He says in verse 11, God knows. God knows his feelings for his readers.

God knows his motivation. God knows his ministry. Paul's financial policy created a two-fold difficulty, which his foes probably grasped, and they latched onto it, which we have just mentioned.

That is, it was not an apostle, for it did not exercise apostolic privilege. The apostolic privilege was money. Now, we need to say a little bit about that even though we're talking about finance.

We need to be very careful today when we are motivated just by money. We preach. Before people go to preach, they already say, well, please, my love offering cannot be less than this amount.

So they already calculate, this is my love offering. This is done today when people negotiate the love offerings they want to get when they preach. It doesn't matter whether the church can afford it or cannot afford it.

I remember the story of a minister who went to England to preach. A true story now: he left the US and went to England to preach. And when he got there, he went with a private jet.

And when he finished, they gave him a certain amount of money, which he felt it was not enough. He said, okay, this amount you want to give me, you take your money, but just pay for the place that I parked the hangar where I parked my plane because the money you gave me is not even up to the money I've used in my plane.

Paul says, sorry, I'm not like that. What Paul is saying is relevant for today. You see, the preachers who were going around in the Corinthian church preached for pay.

Paul says, count me out. I'm not going to allow anybody to take my boasting away. He will continue his policy in order to cut off opportunities for his enemies who desire to be regarded as being equal to him in financial policies.

So, Paul says, no, don't count me as one of them. He knew what his enemies were fishing for, and he was not going to take the bait. They are seeking to cast off their disadvantage by getting him to adopt their policy of ministry with charge.

Then you see in verses 13 to 15, for such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.

Their end will match their deeds. Their ends will match their deed. You see, we need to listen to what Paul is saying.

He said these people are very subtle. He calls them deceitful workers. Paul now plainly states what he has been implying.

He sharpens his differences with his opponents in Corinth. Let's put it this way. It's like he was angry.

This is a kind of holy indignation. He describes them with language that was very severe. What does he call them? He says such men are false apostles.

They are deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ, pseudo-apostolos, completely. You know what Paul says? He denies them any legitimacy. He denies their claim to be genuine apostles.

He called it the way it is. From Paul's perspective, they are false in the message they brought to Corinth. They proclaimed a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel than what Paul proclaimed to them.

They are false in the methods they employ, as Paul indicates in verses 13 to 15. Not only was their message wrong, their methods were also wrong—deceitful workers.

Their activities in Corinth are deceitful, treacherous, and cunning. Deceitful. I mean, when Lenski describes the word deceitful, he said it originally meant bait.

And that's why he was not going to take their bait. No, not at all. It was put out to catch victims.

They were using baits. They were catching the people. They were catching the people in their base, throwing the baits to the Corinthians.

They knew what they wanted. And that's exactly what still happens today, where false teachers throw the bait. They know what people want to hear.

And they tell them what they want to hear rather than what God wants them to hear. Deceitful workers. Which appears to have been used as a technical term in the church for those who are in missionary service.

He then says they are only masquerading as apostles of Christ. Like apostles of Christ, it was probably one of their preferred designations; they wanted to be called apostles.

That's what they called themselves. But Paul insists that it was a masquerade. It was a disguise.

A pretense. So, he calls them false apostles. And it's very interesting that the word for masquerade is a catchword in verses 13 to 15.

It appears three times. Its threefold appearance binds the verses together in verses 13 to 15. He calls them masquerades.

They are masquerades. The Greek is used three times in verses 13 to 15. So, in verse 14, in a kind of diatribe language, with irony, the apostle continues and insists that there's nothing incredible about this.

He said, no wonder for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. With the description of Satan as an angel of light, Paul may possibly reflect acquaintance with certain Jewish legends. Angel, he said, even Satan himself masquerades himself.

And I'm glad to put it this way. He knows that Satan sometimes attempts in the form of the subtle serpent and a roaring lion. But he adds that Satan often, as the angel of light, persuades men to do things under the name of religion, which are subversive of it.

They do things in the name of Christianity, which actually subverts it. I mean, this is what Paul is saying. Verse 15, he says, so it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.

Do you see what Paul does? His form of argument is from the major to the minor. That's the form of argument he uses. If Satan parades himself as the angel of light, how much more are his ministers?

So, if Satan, the great one, great in quotes, takes on a disguise, it is not strange that the lesser, who are servants, also disguise themselves as something different from who they really are. We must be discerning. You know, he calls them servants, the archon oi, actually ministers, which has been significant throughout the letter up to this point.

We've seen servants of righteousness. I mean, we've seen it in various places, but here, they will disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. But he says, no, look at what he says. Their end will match their deeds.

Now, Paul's behavior was more than an apostolic strategy. It came from deep motives, from his knowledge and experience of Christ. The ultimate justification of Paul's attitude was Christological, saying, look, I've presented Christ to you.

You've been transformed by the truth of Christ. And from this reality, Paul could not be separated. And he was telling the Corinthians, beware.

Then from 11:16 to 21, he appeals again to bear with his boasting. Paul's sarcasm and his hesitancy to promote himself can be easily designed in verses 16 to 21. He would rather talk about Jesus.

But that message is hindered by the Corinthians' disregard of his credentials as a true apostle, as a true representative of Jesus. Paul is not like the real fools who boast of their credentials. You see, Paul's rivals in Corinth employed boasting as a weapon to gain the favor of the Corinthians.

What does he say? He says, seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. He said, okay, they are doing it. Then let me do it as well.

Since they are doing it, I'll do it as well. So, you will see what it means. The acceptance of such tactics leads Paul in desperation to use the means of boasting as well.

And you know, as I said that, I remember what our proverb says. It says in a place, do not answer a fool according to his folly. So, you don't want to look foolish.

But then it says again, in the next verse, to answer a fool according to his folly. Because if you keep quiet, he will think that otherwise, you need to reveal his foolishness to him. And that's exactly what Paul's foolish boasting is doing here.

If Paul had kept quiet, we said it, when he's away, he's bold. But when he's here, he's timid, he's fearful. So, if he kept quiet, it's a problem.

But now he says, okay, I need to let you know that I'm just as bold as you so that you can see your own foolishness. So that is exactly what is going on here. Paul does give it to them.

Now, let me put it that way. He said, you guys, you are just wrong. They were boasting based on their credentials.

This will be evident when Paul starts, when he begins to state his own credentials as a true apostle. You see, Paul feels some force into writing about himself, seeing that many boast according to human standards, I'm going to boast. That's what he said.

But Paul's boasting will be nothing like the boasting of the many who boast according to the flesh. Again, Paul uses a biting sarcasm. You see, when it is necessary for us to boast, let us make certain that we do not do it according to what people do ordinarily.

We must be motivated by a worthy purpose and do it in a way that God is exalted. It's only as we yield to the Holy Spirit that we can, Holy Spirit control, that we can do this. If the Corinthian Christians are wise enough to put up with so many fools, surely they can listen to Paul for a while.



I mean, they have been listening to many fools who are coming into their midst. Why can't they listen to Paul for a while? So, taking off from 21 to the end of that chapter, Paul begins to list his own credentials. Think about this.

I told you in one of the lectures that I usually do this to my students. I tell them these are Paul's credentials. Now, look at Paul's qualifications for ministry.

He said, to my shame, I must say we were too weak for that. But whatever anyone dares to boast, I am speaking as a fool. I also dare to boast of that.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. So good. So far, so good. Are they Israelites? So am I. So far, so good.

Are they descendants of Abraham? Wonderful. Are they ministers of Christ? Oh, this is so good. I mean, wonderful great credentials.

I'm talking like a madman. I'm a better one with far greater labels, far more imprisonment. And then now, look at his credentials.

I want you to begin to read with me from verse 23 again, even though we read it once. But you read it again. It says in verse 23, are they servants of Christ? I speak as if I am insane.

I am also in far more labels. Now, listen to this. Here are his credentials.

More labels, more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death, five times received thirty-nine lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a knight and... I mean, these are great qualifications, aren't they? I mean, who wants to hire somebody with these fantastic and great qualifications? Beaten all around, brow beaten everywhere. But he says, look. In fact, when he gets to verse 33, he says, I was let down in a basket.

That's how bad it was. As I read this section, William Shakespeare's story of the murder of Julius Caesar comes to mind. You know, Brutus was the one who murdered Julius Caesar at the funeral, sorry, when Julius Caesar was killed, rather.

At the funeral, Brutus turns up to say that Julius Caesar was an overly ambitious person. Brutus and his accomplices loved Rome so much that, although they hated to kill Caesar, they had to do it. So, MacAnthony stands up to make the now familiar speech.

Remember, when Caesar was killed, he said, et tu, Brute, and you too, Brutus. Now, MacAnthony comes and makes a speech. He says, friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. But then, he goes on in this speech to softly and cleverly begin to praise Caesar, to unfold the greatness of his friend, and undermine the words of Brutus. Listen to what he says.

He was my friend, faithful and just to me, but Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man. When that the poor have cried, Caesar has wept. Ambition should be made of standard stuff, yet Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an ordinary man.

You see, MacAnthony continues on in this manner, talking about the honorable Brutus, in quote, a honorable Brutus who had just slain this noble person, and at the end, he has turned everybody against Brutus. Claiming he will not praise Caesar, MacAnthony actually elucidates the greatness of his friend. Paul's full speech is somewhat similar in intent.

He said, this is foolish boasting, and I really don't want to boast. Paul, you really don't want to boast, and he ended up boasting. He really says, no, these preachers, this is who they are.

He reveals their folly for what it is, and he reveals the folly of the Corinthians for what it is in their turning away. I mean, Paul speaks as a fool, and in boasting as his opponents do, he turns their boasting on its head. He says he's going to speak as his opponents do, but in effect, he just does exactly the opposite.

You see, Paul's opponents are made to make important claims. One, they touted their ethnic background as Jews. Paul countered their claim by saying that he had an entire ethnic background comparable to that of his opponents.

He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a term that set him apart from Hellenized Jews. He was an Israelite and a descendant of Abraham. As such, he was not adopted by Abraham's family as Gentile believers were.

One must note that for Paul, neither Jew nor Gentile was superior in Christ. However, ethnicity seemed to have mattered to Paul's opponents. So, Paul responded that he passed their ethnic standard.

Number two, they claimed to be servants of Christ. So, in verses 23 to 33, Paul describes the extraordinary service he had rendered to the Lord. He details his sufferings for the proclamation of the gospel.

You see, the number, the frequency, the variety, and intensity of his sufferings are so overwhelming. He experienced pain as intensely as anyone would, but he had a proper perspective, knowing that it was all for Christ. And now listen, not just all for Christ, it was for the Corinthians as well.

So, the Corinthians should be able to see the foolishness of turning away from Paul and turning to these people who are making money off them. As a true apostle, he had empathy for them. If they are servants of Christ, it was more.

We see that in verse 25. In verse 26, he says that he'd been constantly on the move, traveling all in ministry. You see, in the final analysis, what Paul glories in most of all is the time his own weakness was most apparent.

He refers to his experience in Acts chapter 9 as an example of weakness and humiliation. He says that that is the occasion he will boast most of. What Paul was determined to do would matter to him; what Paul determined would matter to him most was the approval of Christ.

He recognized that in his weakness, the Lord Jesus Christ was magnified. Every time he was weak, and something was accomplished, Jesus got the honor, the glory, and the credit. It was this single-minded devotion to the Lord that made Paul stop caring what others in Christian society surroundings thought of him.

His life was linked to Jesus Christ, who enabled him to live triumphantly in the midst of great adversities and difficulties. Paul's opposition in Corinth was just the opposite. They wanted others to speak well of them.

They argued as to who had the greater name among their friends. So Paul says he will boast like they do. But then, having begun like Mark Anthony, who said, I've come to bury Caesar, not to praise him, Paul's boasting is all of his weakness.

His own boasting unmasks the foolishness of his opponents.

This is Dr. Ayo Adewuya in his teaching on 2 Corinthians. This is session 12, 2 Corinthians 11, Paul's Foolish Boasting.