

"Paul's Defense of his Apostleship"

Part 9

2 Corinthians 11

Introduction: Last week in our study of 2 Corinthians 11 we were able to complete our look at the sufferings of Paul from the list which he had compiled here in verses 23-28. This was only a partial list for I am sure Paul could have written volumes on his personal life experiences. I was thinking this past week about how a modern-day Pastor would use this list if it applied to him for personal gain and promotion. If the list we have just come through was something that a man of our day had lived through this would be printed in a flyer and circulated to all the places where he desired to speak. It may read something like this: *"Come see the man who has faced death repeatedly, come see the man who has been beaten for his faith by the Jews and by the Gentiles. Come see the man who lived through hunger, thirst, cold and heat. Come see the man who has started multiple churches and who has led thousands to Jesus Christ. Come see the man who is like no other man."*

I also thought about how these experiences would be used to sell books. If this happened to a Pastor or Evangelist today it would be placed in a book and promoted in every Christian circle in the United States. If a modern-day Pastor or Evangelist had these sufferings to list on his resume they would be worn as a badge of honor. But that was not the case with Paul. Paul did not desire to even speak of these sufferings which he had went through.

Notice 2 Corinthians 11:1, 16

To even mention this was "folly" in the eyes of Paul. Paul would not glory in these sufferings nor would he ever think about using them for personal gain. This really brings into focus what is happening under the banner of the "church" today. There are many books for sale about someone's ability to "grow" the church. There are books written about so called personal experiences and an example would be people who claim they have died and went to heaven or to hell and came back again. They write of what they have claimed to have experienced while in heaven or hell. These books by the way are nothing but tools for personal gain and promotion. Don't you dare buy into the stories written about people who have claimed to have died and gone to heaven or hell and then came back to write a book. That would be NEW REVELATION and there is no NEW REVELATION. We have all the revelation we need right here in the Bible.

The point I am making with all of this is the Paul was a truly humble man and he hated to boast. He boasted within the section we have just looked at and while he boasted he remained humble. The sufferings which he listed here was not something he would claim for personal fame. This was not what he desired to be known for. But there was something which he would boast in and that is what we have come to tonight.

I. **Paul's Weaknesses**

Notice 2 Corinthians 11:30

Here in this verse Paul lets us know that he would only boast in the things which concerned his "infirmities" which means weaknesses. This means he would only glory in the times when he was proven to be weak or the times when he was proven to be inadequate. He is referring to the times when his weakness was revealed to his opponents.

This seems so odd that he would boast of the times when his opponents were permitted to see his weaknesses. We would expect a man to boast of his accomplishments. We would expect to hear how many people he brought to Christ or how many churches he planted. We would expect to hear of how the use of his apostolic gifts silenced the critics which opposed him. We would expect to hear of the miles he traveled and the personal sacrifices he made. But that is all far from his mind. This all brings a question into my mind, "Why would he boast of the times when his weaknesses were on display and not boast of the positive accomplishments in his life?"

The reason was because the positive accomplishments were because of God at work in his life. He could never take credit for what God was doing. He could never use the work of the Lord for self-promotion. That would be stealing God's glory.

1 Peter 4:9-11

⁹ Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

¹⁰ As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

¹¹ If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:10-11

¹⁰ But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

¹¹ To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Let us remember what happened to Nebuchadnezzar when he attempted to steal the glory away from God.

Daniel 4:29-37

²⁹ *At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.*

³⁰ The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

³¹ *While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.*

³² *And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*

³³ *The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.*

³⁴ *And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:*

³⁵ *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*

³⁶ *At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.*

³⁷ *Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*

Paul would never think of robbing God of His glory and that is why he would not boast of his accomplishments. But we must still ask, "Why does he boast in his weaknesses?" I believe there are two reasons:

1. In his weakness he was at his best. The times of weakness showed that Paul had nothing to glory in except the cross. When he was effective it was all because of God but when he was weak it was Paul in his own strength at his best. This was the best of himself he had to boast in.
2. When he was weak then in those situations the will of God and the power of God was clearly revealed. This we shall see.

Notice 2 Corinthians 11:31

Here in this verse Paul calls upon God to be his witness because it was so strange for someone to only boast in their weaknesses. Many would call Paul a liar because of this claim so he calls upon God to be his witness that he is not lying.

Now as we continue to the end of this chapter Paul will point to a single experience which at first glance does not seem to fit in this text but when it is understood it is the experience which Paul boasted in.

Notice 2 Corinthians 11:32-33

This situation is recorded in Acts 9.

Acts 9:22-25

²² But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

²³ And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

²⁴ But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

For us to understand why Paul points to this experience which took place in Damascus we need to do a little research.

Paul was converted on the Damascus Road and immediately he began to witness to the Jews.

Acts 9:15-23

¹⁵ But the Lord said unto him[Ananias], Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

¹⁶ For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

¹⁷ And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

¹⁹ And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

²⁰ And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

²¹ But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

²² But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

²³ And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

Now there is something which happened shortly after his conversion and the event listed in 2 Corinthians 11.

Galatians 1:13-18

¹³ For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

¹⁴ And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

¹⁶ To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

¹⁷ Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

Let me show you where the return to Damascus fits in.

Acts 9:22-25

²² *But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.*

²³ *And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:*

²⁴ *But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.*

²⁵ *Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.*

The MANY DAYS spoken of here was the 3 year period at Arabia where Paul studied the Word. He then came back to Damascus and had the encounter found in 2 Corinthians 11.

Notice 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 again.

Here we get the details of the encounter. But how does all of this fit the text before us?

When Paul went to Arabia he studied the Old Testament and he was now able to see Jesus all over the pages of the Bible. He then brought back this knowledge and began to use it to convert the Jews. Now because of his background as a Jew which is recorded in Philippians he saw himself as the PERFECT missionary to the Jews.

Philippians 3:5-6

⁵ *Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;*

⁶ *Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

He took his knowledge of the Old Testament and he combined it with his new understanding of the Old Testament and his ability to see Christ on every page and he carried it to the Jews. In his mind he had all that was required to be the PERFECT missionary to the Jews. He would go into their synagogues and he would expound the Scriptures every time he had an opportunity. He did the very best he could but it all kept falling apart. Then it finally reached the climax when he had to be let down in the basket through the window. As he walked away from the city that night in the midst of his shattered expectations he began to realize a very important spiritual Truth. He learned that his natural gifts were not what qualified him to be a servant of Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice Stedman's words on this thought.

"We are being bombarded with the philosophy that natural abilities are what make you usable as a Christian -- a strong personality, an outgoing, optimistic outlook, gifts of leadership, handsome frame and body, musical ability, speaking ability -- all these are the things that God will use.

Paul says, "That's a bunch of baloney. I had to learn that did not help, that Christ working in me is the only thing that God approves of." Anybody who is a Christian has that, and if you learn to reckon on Jesus at work within, ready to work through you as you choose to do things, he will work alongside you and make them meaningful and valuable both in God's sight and ultimately man's. That is the great secret that Paul learned. That is why he says, "I look back on that incident on the Damascus wall and I have never forgotten it." He goes on in Philippians 3 to tell us all those things he once counted gain he now counts as nothing but a pile of barnyard manure in contrast to what he has learned Christ can become to him."

Philippians 3:7-10

⁷ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Conclusion:

This is what Paul boasted of, it was the when he had come to learn that serving Christ was about being controlled by the Holy Spirit and not about relying upon his abilities of natural gifts. He had no power and only when Christ worked through him would there be any positive results.