

TITLE: PAUL DEFENDS HIS CHARACTER

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 11

INTRO: Phil 1:15-18 shows us that Paul is not thin-skinned; he can handle & even ignore personal attacks! But when these attacks damage his ability to teach, when they violate Christ & His gospel message, Paul will fight back! Where there's still hope to reach people (Christian or non-Christian), Paul defends Christ & himself.

I. HIS CHARACTER – SEEN IN HIS COMMITMENT TO THE CHURCH (v. 1-15):

A. PURPOSE OF PAUL (v. 1-11)

1. His concern for the Corinthians (v. 1-4)

(v. 1) *Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.* Here is Paul's thesis for the next 2 chapters! "Would to God" (interjection – "oh that you would...!") "bear" (put with) me in my folly (foolishness, egotism). This is obviously sarcasm (Paul is not foolish or an egotist); but what he's going to say in ch. 11-12 is basically foolish egotism, if you don't understand *why* he's saying it (**11:1,16,17,21,23; 12:1,11**). Paul doesn't *want* to say this, but he must!

(v. 2) *For I am jealous (bad or good sense; burn w/zeal, desire earnestly) over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.* Paul had the same good "jealousy" that God had. They were to be like a chaste/pure virgin bride for Christ (what man wants a floozy?). The church is to be pure! One way to become impure is to follow false teachers; *both* will be lost (cf. **Eze 3:18**)! Paul pleads w/them because he knows this!

(v. 3) *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.* Very little has changed since the garden! Just like Satan tricked Eve, these false teachers at Corinth were fooling the Corinthians (i.e., doing the devil's work), perverting the simplicity ("openness, sincerity, free from hypocrisy") of Christ. And they're doing it just as much today, because like Eve, people let them (v. 4)!

(v. 4) *For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached...ye might well bear with him.* In other words, **you let it happen** (cf. **Gal 1:6**)! Nobody can *force* you to disobey God or accept a false teaching. It happens when you ignore His Word and choose **not** to check out what the teacher is teaching (**Acts 17:11**).

2. His commitment to the Corinthians (v. 5-11)

(v. 5) *For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.*

1. This is sarcasm; there are no "chief" apostles. Paul is most likely referring to those at Corinth claiming this title. "So as 'chief' as anyone there claims to be, I am no less!" Paul wasn't inferior to anyone (especially these men at Corinth).
2. Incidentally, how could Paul say this if Peter was the first pope? Peter never claimed this title; he simply called himself an apostle (**1 Pet 1:1**) & a fellow elder (**1 Pet 5:1**). So even if he were just a "chief" apostle, Paul would be too! This refutes the Catholic ideas regarding Peter as pope.

(v. 6) *though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.*

1. I'm rude (idiot; unlearned, illiterate, unskilled) in speech (**1 Cor 2:3-4**), but not in knowledge!
2. We have **a**) been made manifest (passive voice), or **b**) made it (knowledge) manifest (active voice). Passive voice seems to fit the context better – Paul is defending himself (*we have been thoroughly made manifest among you*).

(v. 7-9) *Have I committed an offence (sin) in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches (sarcasm), taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, & wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.*

1. This goes back to **1 Cor 9** – Paul was worthy of payment, but refused to accept it (this was his personal rejoicing–**v. 18**).
2. When I was with you, and had monetary needs, other brethren helped. I didn't let *you* be burdened!
3. This was a big part of the attack on Paul. Why? Maybe the false brethren were accusing Paul of calling the Corinthians inferior to other churches by not accepting their money (**12:13**). Also, maybe they *were* exacting money from them!

(v. 10-11) *...no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.* Why do I do refuse money from you & rejoice in it? Because I love you (& to silence the false brethren– **v. 12f**).

B. PURPOSE OF THE FALSE APOSTLES (v. 12-15)

(v. 12) *But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.* They wanted to be like us (considered apostles), but *they* demand money! So if they want to be like Paul, they should stop taking \$ (no chance)! Also, if they accused him for *not* taking money, imagine what they'd say if he had!

(v. 13-15) *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.* Paul exposes them for who they are!

1. They're false apostles. Apostle="one sent"; so these men at Corinth were **not** sent (i.e., liars), deceitful workers (their goal is to deceive), transforming themselves into apostles (they were fakers, liars, false teachers, only wanting money). This sounds like a lot of so-called "pastors" and televangelists around us today. The Word exposes & defeats them (**10:3-5**)!
2. Satan transforms himself... How? Either literally, taking a human form (*we never* see this, even in the 1st century). Or figuratively, through false teachers just like these in Corinth (this seems to be what he's saying here).
3. Paul calls these false apostles "his (Satan's) ministers." There's an important lesson here: If it's not for God, it's for Satan! Whether it was Satan literally taking over someone (as in the 1st century), or someone allowing Satan's lies to deceive him so that he now teaches error, the end result is the same: Satan is glorified, God is *not*, and those involved are lost!
4. This is as strong a condemnation of false teachers as there is (see also 2 Pet 2-3)!

CONCLUSION: There are so many naïve people in religion today. So many, even in the church, refuse to believe that anyone who teaches in the name of Christianity could be a deceiver! Others acknowledge that false teachers exist, but they would/could never recognize one. Why? Because they don't know God's Word! This makes the deceiver's job easy, and ours difficult. But we must keep trying.

II. HIS CHARACTER – SEEN IN HIS SUFFERING FOR THE CHURCH (v. 16-33):

A. AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS SUFFERINGS (Foolishness in boasting) (v. 16-21)

(v. 16-17) *I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. That which I speak, I speak it not after (according to) the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.*

1. Don't think I'm a fool (mindless, stupid)! Paul knew what was going on there, seen by his exposing of these fakers.
2. Otherwise, if you do, then receive me as a fool, that I may boast a little. This is how fools are (boastful, arrogant), & you're forcing me to act this way by requiring me to defend myself and sound like a foolish boaster!
3. *I speak this not after the Lord* – this doesn't mean that what he's about to say wasn't inspired by God. As an apostle, all his words were inspired. But what he's about to say is NOT consistent w/Christianity; it's NOT the example he wants to set!

(v. 18-20) *Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you....*

1. *Seeing that many...* Did Paul just say, "everyone else is doing it, so I will too"? No! The "many" are his adversaries there at Corinth. Paul sees through them, but clearly some of the brethren there can't (or won't), who he sarcastically calls "wise"!
2. You allow these men ("fools") to bring you into bondage (), devour you, etc. You're weak! Why do you submit to men like this? You're the opposite of the Bereans (**Acts 17:11**)! So, if you listen to them, you better listen to me too!

(v. 21) *I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.* "As though we were weak"—the Greek is difficult to translate, but it seems he's saying that whether he was literally weak, or just accused of being weak, either way he will be **bold**! Again he says this is foolish; he shouldn't have to say this!

B. A PRESENTATION OF HIS SUFFERINGS (v. 22-31)

(v. 22) *Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.* Here it begins! Let's compare resumes: Hebrew? Yep! Israelite? Yep! These two are not exactly the same, but for Paul's purposes, they can be treated the same – physical descendants of Abraham, & Jacob specifically. Paul was as Hebrew/Israelite as anybody. Seed of Abraham (spiritual descendants)? Yep! These things show that his adversaries at Corinth were Jewish, & probably Judaizers.

(v. 23) General sufferings: *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.* I'm more of a minister (servant) of Christ than they are! Again he reminds them that this is foolish to do, but he has to do it! And from here he starts listing the sufferings he had endured as a servant (because a servant of Christ **will have to endure suffering (2 Tim 2:2; 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-19, etc.)**).

- Paul had endured more *labors* (toil, pain), more *stripes* (wound, beating, just as Christ endured—v. 25), more *prisons* (e.g., Philippi), more *deaths* (I die daily—**1 Cor 15:31**; obviously not literal death, but the real danger of it—e.g., Lystra—**Ac 14:19**).

(v. 24-27) Specific suffering: *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods....*

1. (v. 24-25) *forty stripes save one* – Jews had this regulation (**Dt 25:3**). Paul endured it **5 times!** *Beaten w/rods 3 times* (in Philippi—**Acts 16:22-23**); *stoned once (Lystra—Ac 14)*; *suffered shipwreck 3 times* (this is before **Ac 27**), *a night & day in the deep* (i.e., sea; probably a result of a shipwreck; probably sometime during the 2nd or 3rd missionary journeys).
2. (v. 26) *In frequent journeyings* (travel – no home comforts, no place to lay his head—cf. **Mt 8:20**), *in perils (dangers) of water, robbers* (more susceptible to this when traveling), *my own countrymen* (kin; Jews), *heathen* (nations; Gentiles) (no safe people: Jew & Gentile alike hated Paul!), *in the city, wilderness, sea* (no safe place for him, or a true, sound, working Christian!), *among false brethren* (e.g., at Corinth, Galatia! This is the worst peril of all; it can destroy the church!)
3. (v. 27) *In weariness* ("labors"—v. 23) & *painfulness* (hardship, toil), *in watchings* (need for sleep—**6:5**), *in hunger & thirst, in fastings often* (non-religious, involuntary fasting—**6:5**), *in cold & nakedness* (his obvious daily needs hadn't been met).
4. Much of this suffering we aren't told about specifically. Apparently we don't need to know the details, just that it happened.
5. How did Paul make it through all this? By seeking first the kingdom instead of daily needs (**Mt 6:33; Acts 20:24**). Can we do this? Regarding these sufferings, Paul was *not* supposed to be the exception to the rule in Christianity. *We* are to show ourselves approved by our willingness to suffer in the same ways (**6:4-10** – Labors, stripes, prisons, watchings, fastings).

(v. 28) *Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*

1. It's clear none of your false apostles can "compete" with my resume of suffering ("things without"—external persecution).
2. But above all these things, Paul had a daily trial to deal with – the care (anxiety, distraction) of all the churches (e.g., Rome, Jerusalem, Syrian Antioch, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Troas, Ephesus, Philippi, Thess, Berea, Corinth, etc.).

(v. 29) *Who is weak, & I am not weak? Who is offended, & I burn not?* Paul felt *everything* that happened to each congregation. When one was weak, he felt it. When one was caused to stumble, he burned with indignation (NKJV). He always cared!

(v. 30-31) *If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern my infirmity. The God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.*

1. Paul could've gloried/boasted in his rank as an apostle, or the gifts given to him by the HS, or his extensive work for the kingdom. But instead, he chose to rejoice in these weaknesses (in which he far surpassed any of these false brethren).
2. Why did he choose these things? Maybe because they showed his love for the kingdom more than anything else! It's one thing to do a lot of work for the church; it's completely different to endure even a portion of what Paul endured!

C. AN EXAMPLE OF HIS SUFFERINGS (v. 32-33)

In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands. This was Paul's introduction to Christianity!

1. Luke records this in **Acts 9:23-25**, which is given to show the amazing change in Paul – from persecutor to persecuted!
2. Had any such change occurred in the false brethren? What about us? Persecutor or not, are you now persecuted in any way? Are you willing to endure what Paul just spoke of in v. 23-27? Do you feel for the church the way he did (v. 28)?

CONCLUSION: Paul's attitude stands in stark contrast to the 'social club' mentality so many have about the church today! They have no clue what the church cost Christ (**Ac 20:28**), Paul, & us (**Lk 9:23; Phil 1:29**). Do you love & value the church like Paul did? Will you suffer for it?