

“THE RESUMÉ OF DEVOTION”

2 Corinthians 11:22-33

Theme: We must attribute the ability to endure faithfully to the grace of God, not our abilities.

Introduction: False apostles had infiltrated the Corinthian church—men who boasted of their credentials, demanded respect, and presented themselves as superior spiritual leaders. In contrast, the Apostle Paul found himself in the awkward position of having to “boast” to defend his ministry. But Paul’s boasting was radically different. He didn’t boast about his accomplishments, power, or eloquence. Instead, he turned the idea of boasting upside down—boasting in weakness, suffering, and the burdens he bore for the sake of Christ and His people.

In today’s passage, 2 Corinthians 11:22–33, we see Paul giving a passionate, personal defense not rooted in pride, but in pastoral love and gospel authenticity. Through this unique “foolish” boasting, Paul unmask the emptiness of self-promotion and reveals the actual cost of gospel ministry.

As we examine this text, we’ll consider three aspects of Paul’s boasting:

I. The Boasting in His Heritage – not as a badge of superiority, but to connect with those who prided themselves on lineage.

II. The Boasting in His Hardships – a list not of triumphs, but of trials that testified to his devotion to Christ.

III. The Boasting in His Heart – a shepherd’s concern for the church and a heart burdened with genuine love for God’s people.

May this passage challenge us to measure ministry not by worldly standards of success, but by the faithful endurance and humble love that mark a true servant of Christ. Our theme is: ***We must attribute our ability to endure faithfully to the grace of God, not our abilities.***

I. The Boasting in His Heritage – *11:22-23a*

A. His Blessed Origin – *v. 22*

1. Paul, having given in the previous section a scathing & often sarcastic disclaimer to boasting, engages in what the Corinthians had demonstrated they wanted from those to whom they would listen.
2. So, holding his nose, he begins to “boast,” but not in the way one would expect.
3. Instead of listing a series of his successes and accomplishments, Paul “boasts” in the opposite direction – listing his suffering and sacrifices.
4. But, before he does that, he declares that he is no less qualified

than the corrupt and boastful false teachers.

5. He declares, *“Are they Hebrews? So am I.”*

- a) *Apparently, the false teachers were claiming that Paul was a Hellenistic Jew because he was born out of Palestine in Tarsus and spoke Greek.*
- b) *“Hebrews” [Ἑβραῖος] – was the ethnic name for an Israelite and was indicative that they spoke Hebrew as a first language.*
- c) *It literally means “to come from beyond” and was first used to describe Abraham – [Genesis 14:13](#).*

6. Next, Paul asks, *“Are they Israelites? So am I.”*

- a) *Apparently, the false teachers were claiming that Paul was not faithful to the spiritual heritage of Judaism.*
- b) *“Israelites” [Ἰσραηλῖτης] – describes the spiritual lineage, traced back to Jacob.*
- c) *It is a term that describes those who are spiritually faithful, having been preserved as a remnant of the faithful – cp. [Romans 9:3-6](#).*
- d) *Paul states that he is likewise part of those who have been faithful throughout his life.*

7. Finally, Paul asks, *“Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”*

- a) *The false teachers were apparently claiming that Paul was not a true Jew, and thus was not genuinely part of the Covenant provisions.*
- b) *Paul responded that He was unashamedly a “descendant of Abraham” even as the false teachers claimed to be.*

8. Having established himself socially, religiously, culturally, and linguistically as not inferior to the false teachers, Paul embarks on proving his superiority over them.

B. His Blessed Opportunity – [v. 23a](#)

- 1. Paul’s greatest privilege is to be a servant of Christ, fulfilling whatever commission the Lord would provide to him.
- 2. The false teachers were accusing him of being a self-appointed, self-serving charlatan who was taking advantage of the Corinthians.
- 3. In fact, they were accusing Paul of being precisely what they were – hence, when Paul asks, *“Are they servants of Christ? – I speak as if insane ...”*

4. The term “insane” [παρὰφρονέω] - means irrational, out of mind; a madman – that assertion could not be further from reality.
5. If they are “*servants of Christ*,” that is, if the bar is set that low, “*I more so.*”
6. Notice, he doesn’t say “... *so am I*” – as he completely denied they were actually “*servants of Christ*” – he states that there is no comparison as he prepares to delineate all of what sets him apart from them in his faithfulness to Christ.

II. The Boasting in His Hardships – 11:23b-27

A. The Suffering for Christ – vv. 23b-25

1. As mentioned, Paul skips all the accolades and speaks of what differentiates between the false teachers and him – the willingness to endure hardship and suffering for the sake of the Gospel.
2. He endured “hardship” – “... *in far more labors*” [κόπος] – referring to engaging in activity that is difficult and toilsome.
3. He endured “incarceration” – “... *in far more imprisonments*” [φυλακή] – being placed under guard while confined.
4. He endured “beatings” – “... *beaten times without number*” – so frequently that he has lost count – [πληγή] – a hard stroke with some instrument – whether with a scourge of leather or with rods.
5. He endured “dangers” – “... *often in danger of death*” [θάνατος] – lit. just “deaths” – meaning that Paul regularly was threatened with death – cp. 1 Corinthians 15:31.
 - a) First, “*five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes*” – a punishment that essentially beat someone within an inch of their lives, sometimes being too much to survive.
 - (1) None of these beatings were recorded in Acts, demonstrating Paul endured more than was recorded.
 - (2) According to historians, 29 of these “*lashes*” were applied to the prisoner’s back and thirteen to his chest.¹
 - b) Second, “*Three times I was beaten with rods*” – cp. Acts 16:22-23.
 - c) Then he says, “... *once I was stoned*” – and left for dead – cp. Acts 14:19.

¹ Phillips, Exploring 2 Corinthians, p. 266.

- d) Also, “... *three times I was shipwrecked*” –
- (1) At the time when 2 Corinthians was written, the shipwreck recorded in Acts had not yet happened, and so it must refer to other occasions.
 - (2) It is estimated that Paul sailed about 6,770 miles by sea!
 - (3) Referring to one of those shipwrecks, Paul says, “... *a night and a day I have spent in the deep.*” – a terrifying ordeal where he would have clung to a piece of wreckage to remain afloat until either being rescued or drifting close enough to shore to make it.

B. The Sacrifices for Christ – vv. 26-27

1. In addition, Paul shares various sacrifices he has made for the sake of the Gospel.
2. He shares, “*I have been on frequent journeys*” [ὁδοιπορία] – literally “walking” – it is estimated that Paul tramped about 5,580 miles among his various missionary journeys.
3. In these “*journeys,*” he encountered various “*dangers*” [κίνδυνος] – risking everything ...
 - a) While Travelling
 - (1) Floods - “... *from rivers,*” -
 - (2) Fleecing - “... *from robbers,*” -
 - b) While Testifying
 - (1) Hebrews - “... *from my countrymen*” –
 - (2) Heathens - “... *from the Gentiles,*” –
 - c) While Tarrying
 - (1) “... *in the city,*” –
 - (2) “... *in the wilderness,*” –
 - d) While Toiling
 - (1) “... *on the sea,*” -
 - (2) “... *among false brethren,*” -
4. His sacrifices included various deprivations as well
 - a) In working – “*I have been in labor and hardship,*” -
 - b) In wakefulness – “... *through many sleepless nights,*” -
 - c) In wanting - “... *in hunger and thirst, often without food,*” -
 - d) In weathering – “... *in cold and exposure.*” –
5. Again, Paul boasts of his suffering as what sets him apart from the

money-grabbing, comfort-seeking false teachers.

III. The Boasting in His Heart – **11:28-33**

A. The Pastoral Heart – **vv. 28-29**

1. He continues to talk about the ways he struggles and suffers by describing the empathy he possesses as a genuine pastor.
2. He states, *“Apart from such external things”* – that is, those things that happen to him that he hasn’t even mentioned (the best translation of this phrase).
3. All of Paul’s collective suffering pales in comparison to the internal pressures and hardships he faces as a pastor – *“there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.”*
4. *“concern”* [μέριμνα] - He feels deeply the struggles – a word that means anxiety, worry, care.
5. The cumulative weight of the struggles facing churches – including those being lured into error by false teachers – is almost too much for him to bear.
6. He illustrates this by saying, *“Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?”*
7. A faithful minister in the church cannot be apathetic about the spiritual struggles of those entrusted to him. Paul demonstrates this with intensity and integrity.

B. The Pure Heart – **vv. 30-31**

1. *“If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness”* - He states that his boasting is contrasted with the false teachers in that they boast of what they accomplished while Paul boasts of what he has suffered for the sake of Christ.
2. He appeals to the Lord as his witness – satisfying himself with God’s knowledge of the truth of what he has shared – *“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”*
3. This demonstrates his purity and genuine humility before men.

C. The Patient Heart – **vv. 32-33**

1. Paul closes this “boast” with a reference to perhaps the most humiliating thing he had experienced, as a newly saved man fresh off the haughtiness of his “dignity” as a Pharisee.

2. He shares an account of when he was newly saved – *“In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me,”* – cp. Acts 9:19-25.
3. *“... and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.”*
4. Paul will continue to discuss his experiences in humility by describing himself as caught up to the third heaven, but before he does, he reminds himself and the Corinthians that he was also disgracefully let down off a wall in fear for his life.

We must attribute the ability to endure faithfully to the grace of God, not our abilities.