

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_2 Cor_chp11B)

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 11 (CONTINUED)

In the first fifteen verses of this chapter, Paul has presented arguments in support of the legitimacy of his teaching and ministry in view of criticisms that had been leveled against him by false teachers who were using deceptive rhetoric. In the remainder of the chapter, we find Paul continuing his arguments by discussing his own sufferings and painful experiences on the behalf of those to whom and for whom he ministered.

PAUL’S RELUCTANT BOASTING (2 COR 11:16-21)

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. ¹⁸ Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. ¹⁹ For you, being so wise, tolerate the foolish gladly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.

Observations

- ✦ Paul uses the words “foolish” and “foolishness” five times and the words “boast” and “boasting” four times in these six verses.
- ✦ Paul equates the boasting of the false teachers to be “according to the flesh” (v. 18).
- ✦ The boasting of the false teachers was being tolerated by the Corinthians (v. 19-20).
- ✦ Paul equates the teaching of these false teachers to “enslavement,” “devouring,” “taking advantage of,” and “hitting the face of” the Corinthians – not to mention self-exaltation on the part of the false teachers (v. 20).
- ✦ Paul indicates that in comparison to the false teachers, he has been weak.

Interpretation

- ✦ Paul equates the necessity to boast with foolishness, yet he thought it necessary to do so to counter the “foolish boasting” of the false teachers.
- ✦ As we have previously observed, the false teachers were the Judaizers.
- ✦ The false teachers were boasting in aspects of ministry life that Paul had not thought necessary to highlight previously.
- ✦ Paul had not highlighted these areas of ministry life because his modus operandi was simple and pure (11:3 – “*But I am afraid that ... your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ*”), thus not tainted with any agenda of self-promotion.
- ✦ Paul did not wish to inspire the Corinthians based upon appealing to a sense of obligation or guilt on their part to him.
- ✦ Self-commendation is not consistent with new-man thinking and belief systems (Rom 15:5; Eph 4:24; Col 2:8).

- ✚ The Corinthians were easily lured by the deceptive rhetoric of the false teachers that was resulting in their being placed back into bondage – bondage to legalism – the requirements and traditions associated with the Mosaic Law.
- ✚ The false teachers had readily “devoured” the Corinthians financial contributions, thus abusing the Corinthians and exalting themselves at the expense of these all-too accommodating Corinthians.
- ✚ The false teachers’ accusations against Paul were tantamount to slaps in the face; however, on this occasion, Paul needed to respond with proper explanation instead of turning the other cheek, thus appearing to accept the arguments of the Judaizers to be superior to the grace for which Paul was a conduit.

Application

- ✚ Do you overlook and take for granted the sacrifices being made by those involved in ministries that benefit you – ministries that are being discounted in your mind due to the deceptive noise of the rhetoric of the more prominent?
- ✚ Do you have a “knowledge” of Truth without having “internalized” the Truth so that you are more vulnerable to deceptive rhetoric?
- ✚ Current day examples of deceptive rhetoric within the universal “Christian” community:

“...my take on truth is that it is personal, and my view of authority is dynamic. For me, Christian truth takes flesh in the person of Christ, who in the name of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, leads Christian communities into truth and into him, as he is truth. And regarding the authority of truth and Christ, I do not see proof resting in Scripture alone, but in Jesus himself (his life, death, and resurrection) as attested in Scripture and as reflected upon, wrestled with, and discerned within Christian community, by the leading of the Spirit.”¹ *[With only a few slight modifications, these statements could be very poignant, especially if set within the context of a correct interpretative paradigm. However, note the relativistic appeal to mysticism versus a focus upon objective Truth. Note also the subtle undertone of a promotion of truth in addition to Scripture.]*

“Theology must be at its essence, confessional. It is not enough to simply say what is (or really how we see it to be); theology must come from the life of the one who holds it. We may well have a dead theology, not because the ideas are dead, but because the people who passionately held them and the reasons for their conception have passed. Because theology is connected to real life, answering particular questions, concerns, and opportunities of the day, it will be ever-changing. If it is not so, then it may well not be theology – it may be dogma, history, or a collection of random facts, but not theology. Theology is the living understanding of the story of God in play with the story of our lives.

“Theology is not the story of God, and it is not our story; rather, it is the understandings that allow us to connect the two. When my theology no longer serves that purpose, because either my story has changed or my understanding of God’s story changes, then the right and faithful thing is for theology to change as well.

¹ Karen Ward’s response to Mark Driscoll on the subject of Scripture and within the chapter entitled “The Emerging Church and Biblicist Theology” in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches – Five Perspectives*, Robert Webber, general editor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press, 2007), 45-46.

“All theology has developed in a context, and those contexts are tenuous at best, so theology must always be developing.

“We need not only discuss questions of how Christ relates to culture, but of how Christ relates to humanity. I believe we need a far more humane Christianity (not to mention a more feminine Christianity – nurturing, caring, conversational, and process-oriented). Our understanding of humanity will shape our understanding of spirituality.

The theology of the modern church is well equipped to engage with the questions and threats of secularism, but it is not prepared for the engagement with a spiritual world.”²

“Jesusanity is a coined term for the alternative story about Jesus. Here the center of the story is still Jesus, but Jesus as either a prophet or a teacher of religious wisdom. In Jesusanity, Jesus remains very much Jesus of Nazareth. He points the way to God and leads people into a journey with God. His role is primarily one of teacher, guide and example. Jesus’ special status involves his insight into the human condition and the enlightenment he brings to it. There is no enthronement of Jesus at God’s side, only the power of his teaching and example. In this story, the key is that Jesus inspires others, but there is not throne for him. He is one among many – the best, perhaps, and one worthy to learn from and follow.”³

- ✠ Believers do not need to turn the other cheek in the face of false teaching; rather, believers should be ready with an appropriate response given in love.
- ✠ When responding to false teaching and doctrine, the believer’s argument from Scripture is strengthened when the objective Truths of Scripture can be explained within the context of that believer’s experience with Truth in real life situations. (See the continuation of Paul’s argument to follow).

SUFFERING FOR JESUS CHRIST (2 COR 11:22-33)

²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are 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. ²⁴Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶I 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; ²⁷I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? ³⁰If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³²In Damascus, the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

Observations

² Ibid., Doug Pagitt’s chapter titled “The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology,” 121, 123, 124, 139.

³ Darrell L. Bock & Daniel B. Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus – Exposing Popular Culture’s Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers: 2007), 4-5.

- ✚ In these verses, Paul presents a series of questions and provides his responses.
- ✚ The first three questions in verse 22 relate to Jewish heritage.
- ✚ The fourth question in verse 23 relates to being a servant of Christ.
- ✚ In verses 24-33, Paul responds to the fourth question with examples from his own life.
- ✚ When Paul began to detail his achievements in verses 24-33, he supported his superiority, not just equality with his critics.

Interpretation

- ✚ In these verses, Paul's arguments, refutation and denunciation of the false teachers reaches its climax.
- ✚ Paul provides us with insight into some of the arguments and claims being advanced by the false teachers in his first three questions.
- ✚ The term "Hebrew" had at least three different connotations.
 - A "Hebrew" was a pure-blooded Jew.
 - A "Hebrew" was one who could read the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. the Old Testament) in the original languages and speak Aramaic as contrasted with one who knew only Greek (cf. Acts 6:1; Phil. 3:5).
 - A "Hebrew" was one whose family ties were Judean or Palestinian.
- ✚ As an Israelite, Paul was a member of God's select people, as were his critics.
 - Paul traced his descent all the way back to Abraham.
 - He probably did so to connect himself with the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant and circumcision both of which were of extreme importance to the Jews and which had been distorted by the Judaizers.
 - Thus in his upbringing, his citizenship, and his ancestry, Paul was not inferior to any of his Jewish critics as they had evidently contended.
- ✚ Instead of citing successes that he had experienced in his ministry, the awards that he had received from others, he listed his apparent defeats. Paul "boasted" in his weaknesses (v. 30; cf. 12:5, 9, 10).
 - Paul is not magnifying self in the passage.
 - There is complete disparity between himself and his adversaries.
 - He is magnifying the grace of God which had proved to be more than sufficient for his needs – it was the grace of God that had literally plucked him from the throes of death to serve another day and reach the Corinthians.
- ✚ Luke recorded only a few of the sufferings, privations and beatings that Paul endured in Acts (cf. Acts 9:23, 29; 13:14; 14:19, 24; 16:16-40; 18:12; 19:23-41).

Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians fits into Luke's chronology of his life at Acts 20:2, so everything that Paul described here occurred before Acts 20:2. Paul's life involved many more dangerous experiences than we read about in Acts. Paul referred to many imprisonments (v. 23), but Acts only records one before this time (i.e., in Philippi, Acts 16:23-40). He mentioned numberless beatings (v. 23), whereas Acts only records one by now (also in Philippi, Acts 16:22-23). The only record of a near fatal experience in Acts before this was Paul's stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19), though Paul said he had often been in danger of dying (v. 23). Paul claimed to have received whippings by the Jews five times (v. 24), but Acts says nothing about any of these. It does not mention the three beatings (by the Gentiles, v. 25; cf. 2 Tim. 3:11) either.⁴

Paul had already experienced shipwreck three times by now, though Luke recorded none of these in Acts. Paul's night and day in the sea (v. 26) also comes as news to the

⁴ Thomas Constable, "Notes on 2nd Corinthians," www.soniclight.com

reader of Acts. Obviously in Acts Luke gave us only a highly selective account of the Apostle Paul's very difficult life.⁵

- ✠ In verses 31-32, Paul's chronology reverts to perhaps the earliest persecution he experienced on behalf of the gospel – an experience which highlighted the treacherous path he was to tread sustained only by the grace of God.

Perhaps Paul mentioned the final experience he cited because it was his first experience of suffering for the gospel. It provided a pattern for Paul's life that continued. Paul's critics may have charged him with cowardice in his escape from Damascus, though there is no basis for this revealed in the text. That may be an additional reason he mentioned it, though I doubt it. It may also have been that it would have reminded his readers of his supernatural call and appointment as an apostle on the Damascus road. It was undoubtedly a humbling memory for Paul too.

Aretas IV was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas. He lived in Petra and ruled the kingdom of Nabatea (called Arabia in Gal. 1:17) between 9 B.C. and A.D. 40. Damascus at the time of Paul's conversion may have been under Nabatean rule. Alternatively it was under Roman rule, and a colony of Nabateans controlled it. The historical evidence is incomplete. Aretas evidently wanted to arrest Paul because the apostle began evangelizing in that region immediately after his conversion (cf. Acts 9:20; Gal. 1:17, 22-23). His activity antagonized the Jews living in the area who obtained official support for their opposition to Paul (cf. Acts 9:23-25). Aretas himself may have been a Jew.⁶

Application

- ✠ What are some examples of false doctrine and teaching which you are encountering in daily life?
- ✠ Are you prepared to defend the Bible as the source of Truth in the context of a multi-religious and multi-cultural society dominated by relativism?
- ✠ Can you support the objective Truths of Scripture with "subjective" experiences from your life where those Truths have sustained you?
- ✠ Is your life substantially different from the unbeliever? The "good" religious person of another faith?

SUMMARY

In his examples, Paul presented himself as one who did not fit the pattern of "successful" ministers of the gospel. Like the Corinthians, Western Christianity tends to evaluate a person's success on the basis of the standards of the world – particularly the Puritanically-influenced standards of Western culture. Rather than playing down the events in his ministry that made him look inferior, Paul emphasized them because they glorified God's grace and sufficiency and Paul's insufficiency. In view of all Paul's calamities there is no way he could have been so effective unless God was with Him.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.