

Study 12: Chapter 11

Introduction

In addressing the concerns raised by the Judaisers, Paul now uses some flippant language to illustrate the point – which he calls “a little folly”. The illustrations are clear.

Body of the Study

Introduction

The “other” apostles

Boast #1: Paul’s credentials

Boast #2: His devotion to the Corinthians

Boast #3: Comparing myself to them

Boast #4: Paul’s life of sacrifice

The real reason for boasting

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *How does Paul’s example of his escape from Damascus relate to the true nature of leadership? How does this compare to the leadership that was being shown by the Judaisers? What are the practical applications of this for us today?*
- *What is the root problem in Corinth, and how does Paul address it in this chapter?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 12 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 12: Chapter 11

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Introduction

The first few verses are an introduction to the flippant position that Paul is to take. He *plays out* the type of accusations that are made against him. It’s as if he says “OK, lets put these things to the test” And of course, when they are tested, the position of the Judaisers is found to be wanting.

He has a jealousy for the Corinthians, but it is not one that is motivated by greed. Rather, he is proud of them, and concerned about them. “...for I am deeply concerned about you with godly zeal...” (2:11:2 McCord).

Paul has the disposition of a “bridegroom’s friend” who is making the marriage arrangements. He wants to present the Corinthians as a pure and chaste bride to the bridegroom (Christ). This is not the only place where Paul uses the parallel of a bride (the church) presented to the bridegroom (Christ) – Eph 5:23-32

However Paul is concerned that his enemies – the Judaisers – have deceived the Corinthians in just the same way that Eve was deceived by the serpent. The doctrine of Christ is simple – it is not hard to understand. But the Judaisers had tried to pervert it and make it more complex than it really is. They had tried to bind some elements from the Law of Moses into christianity when Christ has freed us from that Law. Just like the story that the serpent gave Eve, it sounds plausible, but has an outcome that leads to death and destruction. We need to make sure that we don’t do the same thing with the gospel!

If those who came, taught about *another Messiah*, or *another gospel*, then there might be some reason to let them speak. Paul is being flippant here, for in Galatians he tells us that “...any other gospel is just a perversion of the gospel...” (Gal 1:6-9). However, the point here is that the Judaisers were not preaching *another Messiah*, or *another gospel* (although in fact they were), but whilst they were coming in the guise of pure christianity they were trying to discredit Paul.

The “other” apostles

After that brief introduction, Paul now begins his flippant boasting. He discusses the “...most eminent apostles...” which at first consideration might be understood to be some of the leaders amongst the other eleven in Jerusalem – most notably Peter (remember that James has been killed by this time – in fact Paul effectively began his ministry (Acts 11) around the same time that James was killed (Acts 12). Even though Paul was called in Acts 9, his ministry didn’t really begin for some time, as he spent three years in Arabia first).

However Paul makes it clear in subsequent verses that it is not the real apostles that he is discussing here “...For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ...” (2:11:13 NKJV) and they “...desire opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things that they boast about...” (2:11:12).

So, we have a clear picture here that the Judaisers had come to Corinth claiming that they were in fact apostles of Christ. Some of them were claiming to be the leaders – the *most eminent* apostles – and Paul says that whoever they are, he is not the least bit inferior to any of them. In fact, he is about to show that he is a long way ahead of them in every direction!

Boast #1: Paul's credentials

He now begins to show (in his flippant manner here) his credentials as compared to the false apostles. His speech was regarded as contemptible, but his letters weighty (2:10:10). Clearly, he did not regard himself as an eloquent speaker and he says here that he is “...untrained in speech...yet not (lacking) in knowledge...” (2:11:6). Paul’s knowledge of God came from several sources:

- His extensive training in the Jewish religion (Gal 1:14)
- The three years that he spent in Arabia where the Lord imparted knowledge to him (Gal 1:16-18)
- The Holy Spirit guided him into all truth, just as He did for the other apostles (Jn 16:13)

By contrast, the false apostles had none of these things, although they might have had a smattering in the Jewish religion, they were no where near as well versed in it as Paul was!

Further, his credentials were well demonstrated to the Corinthians, and it had “...been thoroughly revealed to you in every way...” (2:11:6).

When Paul came to them, he worked with his own hands at his trade of tentmaking (Acts 18:3) so that he would not be a burden on the Corinthians. However his reasons went beyond just *not being a burden*, and he wanted to leave no excuse of “*debt*” and “*owing anything*” to the Corinthians. During this time, the Philippian church supported him (Phil 4:15) and there may have been others. When Silas and Timothy came to him in Corinth, they brought with them some support from Macedonia (Acts 18:5; 2:11:9).

The point that Paul is making here is that it was not wrong for him to do what he did. He asks the question “...did I sin...because I preached the gospel to you free of charge?...” (2:11:7). The answer is an obvious and resounding **NO!**

The Judaisers had used this as an opportunity for self adulation, and were (apparently) saying that the reason that Paul *didn't* take wages from you is that he is an imposter, and therefore didn't regard himself worthy to do so. Paul's obvious response is, that if that was the case, then why would he take wages from *any* church? “...*For I robbed other churches, taking wages from them, to minister to you...*” (2:11:8). Robbery here is obviously a metaphor – for he didn't take money out of their treasury without their permission – but he has taken money from the Philippians who were in deep poverty, so that he might not be seen to be having any dependence from the Corinthians.

Boast #2: His devotion to the Corinthians

Paul confirms his love for the brethren in Corinth, which he says he has boasted “...in the regions of Achaia...” (2:11:10). Paul had gone about telling everyone just how good the Corinthians were! (This doesn't totally sound like the picture that we get from the first letter!) He proposes a rhetorical question to them in the negative, which essentially says *God knows that I do these things because of my love for you all* (2:11:10).

In continuing his boasting, there is an underlying opportunity to cut off the power of his enemies. The Corinthians knew Paul. They knew what he did (think of miracles and the spiritual gifts here). They knew how hard he worked. They knew what he stood for. But the Judaisers had come and were throwing disparaging remarks about Paul. The surprising outcome is that the Corinthians had taken any notice of them whatsoever! In embracing the Judaisers, and siding against Paul, the Corinthians had betrayed their friend! They should have known better!

These “...*false apostles, deceitful workers (had transformed) themselves into apostles of Christ...*” (2:11:13). Building on the former example of the serpent and Eve, Paul says that this should not be a surprise, since “...*Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light...*” (2:11:14 NKJV). Likewise it should be no surprise that the Judaisers – *the*

ministers of Satan – “...transform themselves into ministers of righteousness...” (2:11:15 NKJV). There is no doubt about the result of where this will lead, since “...their end will be according to their works...” (2:11:15 NKJV).

The clear message here is that their works are evil, and the result will be their destruction!

Boast #3: Comparing myself to them

Paul’s adversaries had made boasting *the order of the day*, and so Paul says *OK, let’s just play along here for a bit*. “...if anyone thinks me foolish for doing this, then that’s OK – he can think that...” (my paraphrase of 2:11:16). “...Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast...” (2:11:18 NKJV)

Paul speaks in this way by permission, not as a matter of commandment. He leaves us with a clear understanding that what he is saying is not how he has been commanded to act “...In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool...” (2:11:17 NIV)

The Corinthians had demonstrated how foolish they were. Paul flippantly describes them as “wise”, but the real message is that the Corinthians were as foolish as the Judaisers were. The Judaisers were wise in their own conceit and self-adulation, and by doing so were fools because they deceived and deluded themselves. The Corinthians were foolish because they embraced the Judaisers, even though they might have thought of themselves as being wise for doing so.

So, Paul says *since you are happy to listen to fools, then listen to me as I take a foolish position!* “...For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!...” (2:11:19 NKJV)

They had not recognised where the Judaisers were taking them. They were being taken back into bondage (of the Law of Moses, from which they had been made free by the blood of Christ). “...In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face...” (2:11:20 NIV)

By comparison, the Judaisers (and the Corinthians under their influence) regarded Paul as “weak” (2:10:10). In a real twist of irony, Paul says (in his flippant way) that the reason that he didn’t lead the Corinthians astray was *because he was too weak!* “...To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!...” (2:11:21)

Boast #4: Paul’s life of sacrifice

In the next few verses we have a detailed picture of Paul’s life, that is presented like nowhere else in the scriptures. In putting the pieces together, we need to remember that he is only about half way through his life of ministry. He is on the third journey, and is yet to go back to Jerusalem, then be arrested and put into prison in Caesarea. After this comes the journey to Rome, with a shipwreck on the way and a winter on Malta – a journey that ended up taking around 6 months. After he arrives in Rome he is imprisoned under house arrest for a further 2 years, and then released. Following his release, he then undertakes a fourth journey that lasted for several (probably 5) years before he is again arrested and executed.

We know very little detail of some of the things he discusses here, except that Luke didn’t describe them for us in Acts.

“...Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I...” (2:11:22 NIV) Paul clearly here identifies his enemies as Judaisers. They were probably saying that Paul wasn’t even a real Jew (since he was born in Tarsus as a Roman citizen). They were identifying themselves as true Israelites and descendants of Abraham.

“...Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.)...” (2:11:23 NIV). Paul is about to give the potted summary of his life of service. The Judaisers must have claimed a life of service, but anything they had done could have been no comparison to Paul!

“...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches...” (2:11:23-28 NIV)

In the Acts account, up to this time, we only have record of Paul having been imprisoned on one occasion (In Philippi, Acts 16). After this time, we have a record of his being imprisoned another three times (Jerusalem Acts 22:24; Caesarea Acts 25:4; Rome Acts 28:16). The first century writer *Clement of Rome* says that Paul was imprisoned on seven occasions.

Paul faced death time and again (In Damascus Acts 9:23; Antioch in Pisidia Acts 13:50; Iconium Acts 14:5; Lystra Acts 14:19; Thessalonica Acts 17:5; Berea Acts 17:13; Ephesus Acts 19:23-41). And he will suffer further in his life to come.

None of the scourgings is mentioned in Acts, nor are any of the shipwrecks. Paul was not safe anywhere that he went. And he describes this in the multitude of “perils” on every hand.

The dangers from false brethren were the most heartless of all, as Paul would find himself in the situation of not knowing whom he could trust. This is a deliberate comment towards the Judaisers who had deceived the Corinthians!

On top of all of these concerns, was his deep concern for the welfare of all of the brethren. His main task was to lead people to Christ, but those whom he led were being threatened on every hand. In the midst of the outward trials that he faced, he never gave up on the task. The welfare of the Corinthians not withstanding. He then illustrates the point of concern for the welfare of the brethren “... Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?...” (2:11:29 NIV)

The real reason for boasting

As an interlude in his catalogue of sufferings, Paul reminds the brethren that his real motivation is in the cross and the sufferings of the Lord (Gal 6:14). His own physical infirmities “*kept him sane*” and ensured that he did not get carried away with his own importance. He is soon to discuss these in the next chapter.

He finally discusses his escape from Damascus, which was at a return visit three years after his conversion there. The threats against Paul were so strong, that even three years later he was not safe in the city! He escaped by being let down through the wall in a basket.

In the Acts account, Luke tells us that it was a “...large basket...” (Acts 9:25) whilst here Paul tells us that it was “...through a window in the wall...” (2:11:33). We have here two different writers describing the same event with great clarity, but each adding his own minute amount of detail to the description. Such small deviations are normal, and confirm the independence of the accounts. If the descriptions were identical, it would only confirm that they were copied from one another or contrived.