CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 11 — Paul's Jealousy, Sufferings, and Apostolic Credentials

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 11 is one of the most personal chapters Paul ever wrote.

False teachers had come into the church at Corinth.

Paul calls them **“super-apostles.”**

They were impressive speakers.

They boasted about their background and their achievements.

They looked down on Paul.

And the Corinthians were listening to them.

Paul hated boasting.

In Chapter 10 he said, **“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”**

But now he feels forced to answer these men on their own terms.

So he calls it **“foolishness.”**

He will boast, but only to protect the church.

Paul's concern is like a father protecting his daughter before her wedding.

He had promised the church to Christ.

He did not want her led astray, as the serpent deceived Eve.

Paul then exposes the false apostles.

“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

Then comes his surprising list of credentials.

The false teachers boasted of their successes.

Paul boasts of his sufferings.

Beatings, prison, shipwrecks, dangers, hunger, cold, sleepless nights.

And the daily weight of caring for all the churches.

Finally, he boasts about the most humbling moment of all.

Being let down over a city wall in a basket to escape.

Paul's message is clear.

The true servant of Christ is not proven by impressive words.

He is proven by faithful suffering for Christ.

The chapter moves through six movements:

- Paul's Godly Jealousy for the Church (verses 1–4).
- Paul's Apostolic Authority (verses 5–11).
- False Apostles and Deception (verses 12–15).
- Paul's Sufferings for Christ (verses 16–21).
- Paul's Credentials in Suffering (verses 22–29).
- Paul's Boast in Weakness (verses 30–33).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 11 is:

True servants of Christ guard the church's pure devotion to Him, expose deception that comes disguised as light, and are proven not by impressive boasting but by faithful suffering and weakness through which God's strength is shown.

I. A LITTLE FOOLISHNESS

2 Corinthians 11:1 — Bear with Me

"I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Yes, bear with me."

Paul is about to do something he does not like to do.

He is going to boast.

He calls it **"foolishness."**

Boasting about himself went against everything he believed.

But the Corinthians were being won over by men who boasted.

So Paul asks them to be patient with him.

"Yes, bear with me."

He knows they have been very patient with the false teachers.

He asks for a little patience for himself.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:16

> I say it again: do not think I am a fool. But if you do, then accept me as a fool so I can brag a little too.

2 Corinthians 12:11

> I have been acting like a fool, but you made me do it. You should have been the ones speaking well of me.

Proverbs 26:5

> Sometimes you must answer a foolish person in a way that matches his foolishness, or he will think he is wise.

Spiritual Principle

Love sometimes does uncomfortable things to protect God's people.

Key Truth

Paul's “foolish” boasting was not for his own glory but for the church's good.

II. GODLY JEALOUSY

2 Corinthians 11:2 — A Pure Bride for Christ

“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.”

This is not selfish jealousy.

It is the jealousy God has for His people.

God wants His people's whole heart.

“I promised you in marriage to one husband.”

Paul uses a wedding picture.

In those days, a father promised his daughter to a husband.

Then he guarded her until the wedding.

Paul had led the Corinthians to Christ.

He had “promised” them to Christ.

“To present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

Paul wanted to present the church to Christ faithful and pure.

The church is the bride of Christ.

One day He will return for His bride.

Cross References

Ephesians 5:27

> Christ wants to bring the church to Himself as a shining bride, clean and holy, with no spot, no wrinkle, and nothing wrong with her.

Revelation 21:2

> I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It was ready like a bride dressed beautifully for her husband.

Hosea 2:19

> I will make you My bride forever. I will marry you with right living and justice, with faithful love and tender mercy.

Spiritual Principle

The church belongs to Christ alone and must remain faithful to Him.

Application

Is your heart fully devoted to Christ, or divided?

III. THE SERPENT'S CUNNING

2 Corinthians 11:3 — Led Astray

“But I am afraid that, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

“I am afraid.”

Paul was afraid for them.

“Just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning.”

Paul points back to the garden.

The serpent did not attack Eve openly.

He used clever words.

He twisted what God had said.

He made sin look good.

“Your minds may be led astray.”

The danger was in their thinking.

False teaching works the same way.

“From the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

Simplicity means single-hearted.

Purity means unmixed.

Satan's goal is to pull hearts away from a simple, pure love for Christ.

He often does it by adding to Christ or twisting Christ.

Cross References

Genesis 3:1

> The serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal the Lord God had made. He asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

Genesis 3:13

> The Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?” The woman answered, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

1 Timothy 2:14

> Adam was not the one who was fooled. The woman was fooled and fell into sin.

Spiritual Principle

Satan's oldest strategy is to lead minds away from simple devotion to Christ.

Spiritual Warning

Deception rarely looks dangerous. It usually looks reasonable.

IV. ANOTHER JESUS, ANOTHER GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 11:4 — Put Up With Too Easily

“For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the one you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted—you put up with it too easily.”

Paul names three dangers.

“Another Jesus.”

The false teachers used the name of Jesus.

But they did not preach the true Jesus.

“A different spirit.”

Their teaching came from a different spirit, not the Holy Spirit.

“A different gospel.”

Their message was not the true good news.

“You put up with it too easily.”

This was Paul's great concern.

The Corinthians were not standing against it.

They were tolerating it.

It is possible to use Christian words and still preach a false message.

Cross References

Galatians 1:6

> It shocks me how fast you are leaving God, who called you through Christ's grace, and are following some other so-called good news.

Galatians 1:8

> Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel different from the one we preached to you, let God's curse be on him.

1 John 4:1

> My friends, do not trust every voice that claims to speak by the Spirit. Check it to see if it really comes from God. Many fake prophets are out in the world today.

Spiritual Principle

Not everyone who speaks of Jesus preaches the true Jesus.

Application

Do you test what you hear by God's word?

V. THE SUPER-APOSTLES

2 Corinthians 11:5 — Not Inferior

“I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.””

Paul uses a mocking title.

“Super-apostles.”

These were the false teachers who thought highly of themselves.

Paul says plainly that he is not inferior to them in any way.

This is not pride.

It is a defense of his God-given calling.

If the Corinthians rejected Paul, they would be rejecting the gospel he preached.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:11

> I am not less than those super-apostles in any way, even though I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 15:10

> Whatever I am now, God's grace made me. And His grace in me did not go to waste. I worked harder than all of them, but it was God's grace doing the work through me.

Galatians 2:6

> Those who seemed important added nothing to my message. What they were makes no difference to me, because God does not judge by outward appearance.

Spiritual Principle

God's calling, not human impressiveness, makes a true servant.

Key Truth

Do not be dazzled by self-promoting leaders.

VI. UNTRAINED IN SPEECH, NOT IN KNOWLEDGE

2 Corinthians 11:6 — Made Plain to You

“Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, we have made this plain to you in every way.”

“Even if I am unskilled in speaking.”

Paul admits he was not a polished speaker by Greek standards.

He did not use the showy methods of professional speakers.

“I am not so in knowledge.”

But he knew the truth.

He knew the gospel and the mind of God revealed to him.

“We have made this plain to you in every way.”

The Corinthians had seen this for themselves.

Truth matters more than style.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:17

> Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with clever speech, so that the cross of Christ would not lose its power.

1 Corinthians 2:1

> When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with impressive speech or great wisdom as I told you about God.

Exodus 4:10

> Moses said to the Lord, “Lord, I have never been a good speaker. I am slow to speak and my words do not come easily.”

Spiritual Principle

God values the truth of the message more than the polish of the messenger.

Key Truth

A plain speaker with the truth is better than a gifted speaker with a lie.

VII. FREE OF CHARGE

2 Corinthians 11:7 — Humbling Himself

“Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?”

Paul uses a little irony here.

Some criticized Paul for not accepting payment from the Corinthians.

In their culture, a great teacher was paid.

Working with your hands seemed low.

So they thought Paul must not be a real apostle.

“Did I commit a sin by humbling myself?”

Paul had worked as a tentmaker.

He did it so that the gospel would cost them nothing.

“So that you might be exalted.”

He lowered himself to lift them up.

That was what Christ did too.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 9:18

> What is my reward then? It is that I can preach the gospel for free, without using my right to be paid.

Acts 20:33

> I have never wanted anyone's money or clothing.

Philippians 4:15

> You Philippians remember that in the early days of the gospel, no other church shared in my needs except you.

Spiritual Principle

True servants lower themselves to lift others up.

Application

Are you willing to give up your rights for the sake of the gospel?

VIII. ROBBING OTHER CHURCHES

2 Corinthians 11:8 — Support from Others

“I robbed other churches, taking support from them, in order to serve you.”

Paul uses strong language to make a point.

“I robbed other churches.”

He did not really steal.

He means that other churches paid for his ministry in Corinth.

It was as if he took from them to give to the Corinthians.

“In order to serve you.”

The Corinthians received his ministry without paying for it.

Other churches had paid the cost.

Cross References

Philippians 4:15

> When I left Macedonia, you were the only church that partnered with me in giving and receiving.

Philippians 4:16

> Even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help more than once when I needed it.

1 Corinthians 9:14

> In the same way, the Lord has ordered that those who preach the gospel should get their living from the gospel.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel often reaches one place through the sacrifice of believers in another.

Key Truth

Supporting missionaries is a way of sharing in their work.

IX. NOT A BURDEN

2 Corinthians 11:9 — Supplied by Macedonia

“When I was with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.”

“When I was with you and in need.”

Paul sometimes had real needs.

“I did not burden anyone.”

He did not ask the Corinthians for help.

“For the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need.”

Believers from Macedonia brought gifts.

“I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.”

Paul would not change his policy.

He would not give his critics any reason to say he was in it for money.

Cross References

Philippians 4:15

> You know that when I first preached the good news, no church helped me except you.

Philippians 4:18

> I have received everything you sent with Epaphroditus, and I have more than enough. Your gifts are a pleasing offering to God.

Acts 18:5

> When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul gave all his time to preaching, telling the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants should guard against anything that makes the gospel look like a business.

Application

Are your motives in serving God clear of selfish gain?

X. THIS BOASTING WILL NOT BE SILENCED

2 Corinthians 11:10 — The Truth of Christ

“As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, no one in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine.”

“As surely as the truth of Christ is in me.”

Paul makes a solemn statement.

“No one in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine.”

Achaia was the region around Corinth.

Paul's “boast” was that he preached for free.

No one would take that away from him.

He would keep serving them without pay.

Cross References

Romans 9:1

> I am telling the truth in Christ, and I am not lying. My conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit, confirms it.

2 Corinthians 1:23

> I call God as my witness that I did not come back to Corinth because I wanted to spare you.

Romans 15:26

> The believers in Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to give an offering for the poor among God's people in Jerusalem.

Spiritual Principle

A servant's integrity is a treasure worth protecting.

Key Truth

Some things are worth refusing so that the gospel stays pure.

XI. GOD KNOWS I LOVE YOU

2 Corinthians 11:11 — Why?

“Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!”

Some may have said Paul refused their money because he did not love them.

Paul answers with deep feeling.

“God knows I do!”

Paul calls God as his witness.

His refusal to take their money was not coldness.

It was love.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 6:11

> Dear Corinthians, we have spoken openly with you, and our hearts are wide open to you.

Philippians 1:8

God is my witness of how much I long for all of you with the deep love of Christ Jesus.

John 21:17

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked him the third time. He said, “Lord, You know everything. You know I love You.”

Spiritual Principle

Love is sometimes misunderstood, but God knows the heart.

Application

When your love is misunderstood, can you rest in the fact that God knows?

XII. CUTTING THE GROUND FROM UNDER THEM

2 Corinthians 11:12 — Removing Their Opportunity

“But I will continue doing what I am doing, in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be regarded as equal with us in the things they boast about.”

“I will continue doing what I am doing.”

Paul would keep preaching for free.

“In order to cut the ground from under those.”

The false teachers wanted to say they worked just like Paul.

But they were taking money.

As long as Paul served for free, they could not claim to be equal with him.

His sacrifice exposed their motives.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:18

Since many people are bragging about worldly things, I will brag too.

Galatians 6:12

> Those who want to look good to people are trying to force you to be circumcised, so they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

2 Corinthians 2:17

> We are not like the many who sell God's word for profit. We speak with sincerity in Christ, as people sent from God and standing before Him.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful sacrifice exposes false motives.

Key Truth

The way a servant handles money often reveals his heart.

XIII. FALSE APOSTLES

2 Corinthians 11:13 — Disguised as Apostles of Christ

“For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

Paul now speaks very plainly.

“False apostles.”

They claimed to be sent by Christ, but they were not.

“Deceitful workers.”

Their work was based on deception.

“Disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

They wore a mask.

On the outside they looked like servants of Christ.

On the inside they were not.

Cross References

Matthew 7:15

> Be on guard against fake prophets. They dress up like harmless sheep when they come to you, but underneath they are wolves ready to tear you apart.

Acts 20:29

> I know that after I leave, vicious wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

Revelation 2:2

> I know what you do, how hard you work, and how you endure. I know you cannot stand evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and you found them to be liars.

Spiritual Principle

Not everyone who claims to serve Christ truly does.

Spiritual Warning

A false teacher's greatest weapon is looking genuine.

XIV. AN ANGEL OF LIGHT

2 Corinthians 11:14 — Satan's Disguise

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

“And no wonder.”

This should not surprise us.

“For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

Satan is a master of disguise.

He does not usually come looking evil.

He comes looking good.

He comes looking bright, wise, and attractive.

He came to Eve with a reasonable-sounding question.

He still works this way today.

Cross References

Genesis 3:1

> The serpent was the most cunning of all the animals. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say you cannot eat from any tree in the garden?”

Job 1:6

> One day the angels came to stand before the Lord, and Satan came along with them.

Revelation 12:9

> The great dragon was thrown down. He is the ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.

Spiritual Principle

Satan's most dangerous lies come dressed as light.

Spiritual Warning

Do not judge a message by how good it looks, but by whether it agrees with God's word.

XV. THEIR END

2 Corinthians 11:15 — According to Their Deeds

“So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”

“His servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

If Satan disguises himself, so will his servants.

They will look like good, moral people.

They will speak about righteousness.

“Their end will correspond to their deeds.”

God sees through every disguise.

In the end, He will judge them by what they truly did.

Cross References

Matthew 7:22

> On that day many will say to Me, “Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons, and do many miracles?”

Jude 1:13

> They are like wild ocean waves, foaming up their shame. They are like wandering stars, and the deepest darkness is kept for them forever.

Romans 2:6

> God will repay every person according to what they have done.

Spiritual Principle

God sees through every disguise and will judge with perfect justice.

Key Truth

No mask will last on the day of judgment.

XVI. RECEIVE ME AS A FOOL

2 Corinthians 11:16 — Boasting a Little

“I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I too may boast a little.”

Paul returns to his “foolish” boasting.

“Let no one think me foolish.”

Paul is not really a fool.

“But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool.”

If they insist on seeing him that way, let them at least listen.

“So that I too may boast a little.”

Paul's boasting is for a purpose.

He wants to show what a true apostle looks like.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:1

I hope you will put up with a little foolishness from me. Please be patient with me.

1 Corinthians 4:10

We are fools for Christ, but you think you are so wise in Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:11

I have made a fool of myself, but you forced me to.

Spiritual Principle

Sometimes truth must be defended even when it feels awkward.

Key Truth

Paul boasted only to rescue the church from deception.

XVII. NOT AS THE LORD WOULD

2 Corinthians 11:17 — Speaking as a Fool

"What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as a fool."

Paul is honest.

He says boasting is not the way the Lord would speak.

Jesus did not promote Himself.

Paul admits he is stepping outside the normal Christian way of speaking.

He does it only because the situation forces him to.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 7:12

To the rest I say this, and it is my word, not a command from the Lord.

2 Corinthians 11:21

Whatever anyone else dares to brag about—I am talking like a fool—I can brag about it too.

1 Corinthians 7:6

> I say this as a suggestion, not as a command.

Spiritual Principle

Self-promotion is not the way of Christ.

Application

Do you find yourself promoting yourself more than Christ?

XVIII. BOASTING LIKE THE OTHERS

2 Corinthians 11:18 — According to the Flesh

“Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.”

“Many boast according to the flesh.”

The false teachers boasted in human things.

Their background.

Their gifts.

Their success.

“I too will boast.”

Paul will match them, but in a surprising way.

He will show that he could boast in the same things.

Then he will boast in things they would never boast about.

Cross References

Philippians 3:4

> If anyone thinks they have reasons to trust in human things, I have even more.

Galatians 6:13

> Even those who are circumcised do not keep the law. They want you circumcised so they can brag about your flesh.

Jeremiah 9:23

> The Lord says, “Wise people should not brag about their wisdom. Strong people should not brag about their strength. Rich people should not brag about their riches.”

Spiritual Principle

Human credentials are nothing to boast about before God.

Key Truth

What impresses people often means little to God.

XIX. SO WISE

2 Corinthians 11:19 — Putting Up with Fools

“You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise!”

Paul uses sharp irony.

The Corinthians thought they were wise.

Yet they gladly put up with the foolish false teachers.

So surely they could put up with Paul's “foolishness” too.

Paul is trying to wake them up.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:10

> We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong!

Job 12:2

> Job said, “You really think you are the only wise people, and wisdom will die with you!”

Proverbs 26:5

> Answer a fool the way his foolishness deserves, or he will think he is wise.

Spiritual Principle

Pride in our own wisdom can make us blind to deception.

Spiritual Warning

The people most sure of their wisdom are often the easiest to fool.

XX. ENSLAVED AND EXPLOITED

2 Corinthians 11:20 — What They Put Up With

“In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you, exploits you, takes advantage of you, exalts himself, or strikes you in the face.”

Paul describes how the false teachers treated the church.

“Enslaves you.”

They brought people under their control.

“Exploits you.”

They used people for their own gain.

“Takes advantage of you.”

They took what they could.

“Exalts himself.”

They acted superior.

“Strikes you in the face.”

They insulted and humiliated people.

Strangely, the Corinthians accepted it.

Sometimes people mistake harshness and control for strength and authority.

Cross References

Galatians 4:9

> Now that you know God, or rather are known by God, why do you want to go back to those weak and worthless rules and be their slaves again?

Galatians 2:4

> Some false believers sneaked in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to make us slaves.

Isaiah 50:6

> I let them beat my back and pull out my beard. I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.

Spiritual Principle

Controlling and abusive leadership is a sign of a false shepherd.

Spiritual Warning

Do not mistake control and harshness for spiritual authority.

XXI. TOO WEAK FOR THAT

2 Corinthians 11:21 — Daring to Boast

“To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! Yet whatever anyone else dares to boast about —I speak as a fool—I also dare to boast.”

“To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!”

This is irony.

Paul says he was “too weak” to treat them the way the false teachers did.

He would never abuse them.

“Yet whatever anyone else dares to boast about... I also dare to boast.”

Now Paul begins his “foolish” boasting.

If others want to compare credentials, Paul can do that too.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 11:1

> Please put up with a little foolishness from me. Yes, bear with me.

2 Corinthians 12:11

> I have become a fool, but you drove me to it.

1 Corinthians 4:10

> We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored, but we are looked down on.

Spiritual Principle

Gentleness that refuses to abuse is not weakness.

Key Truth

The true shepherd would rather be called weak than harm the flock.

XXII. HEBREWS, ISRAELITES, AND ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN

2 Corinthians 11:22 — So Am I

“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”

The false teachers apparently boasted of their Jewish background.

Paul says he shares the same heritage.

“Hebrews.”

Paul was Hebrew by birth and language.

“Israelites.”

He belonged to God's covenant people.

“Descendants of Abraham.”

He was part of the family of promise.

Paul honored his heritage.

But he did not trust in it for salvation or for his standing as an apostle.

Cross References

Philippians 3:5

> I was circumcised on the eighth day. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews. As for the law, I was a Pharisee.

Romans 11:1

> Has God turned His back on His people? Not at all! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.

Acts 22:3

> I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but raised in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was trained carefully in the law of our ancestors.

Spiritual Principle

Our standing with God rests on Christ, not on our background.

Key Truth

Heritage can be a blessing, but it is never a substitute for faithfulness.

XXIII. SERVANTS OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 11:23 — I Am More So

“Are they servants of Christ? (I am speaking like a madman) I am more so: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.”

“Are they servants of Christ?”

This was the real question.

“I am speaking like a madman.”

Paul knows how strange this sounds.

“I am more so.”

Here is the surprise.

Paul does not list his achievements.

He lists his sufferings.

“Far greater labors.”

He worked harder.

“Far more imprisonments.”

He had been in prison many times.

“Countless beatings.”

He had been beaten more times than he could count.

“Often near death.”

His life had been in danger again and again.

This was the proof of his service.

Cross References

Acts 9:16

> I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.

1 Corinthians 15:10

> I worked harder than any of them, though it was not really me, but God's grace that was with me.

Acts 16:23

> After they were beaten many times, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was ordered to guard them carefully.

Spiritual Principle

A true servant of Christ is proven by faithful suffering, not impressive success.

Key Truth

The world lists achievements; Paul listed scars.

XXIV. FORTY LASHES MINUS ONE

2 Corinthians 11:24 — Five Times

“Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one.”

This was a punishment given in the synagogue.

The law of Moses limited a beating to forty lashes.

To make sure they never went over the limit, they stopped at thirty-nine.

Paul received this five times.

That is 195 lashes.

The synagogue leaders saw Paul as a lawbreaker because he preached Jesus as Messiah.

Paul was himself Jewish, and he loved his people deeply.

Even after this pain, he kept going to the synagogues first and longed for his people to be saved.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 25:3

> The guilty person may be given up to forty lashes, but no more. If he is beaten more than that, your fellow Israelite would be shamed in front of you.

Acts 5:40

> They called the apostles in and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

Matthew 10:17

> Be careful of people. They will hand you over to the courts and whip you in their synagogues.

Spiritual Principle

Love for people can continue even when those people cause us pain.

Application

Can you keep loving those who have hurt you?

XXV. RODS, STONES, AND SHIPWRECKS

2 Corinthians 11:25 — Adrift at Sea

“Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea.”

“Three times I was beaten with rods.”

This was a Roman punishment.

It happened at Philippi and at other times.

“Once I was stoned.”

At Lystra, a crowd stoned Paul and left him for dead.

“Three times I was shipwrecked.”

These were before the famous shipwreck on the way to Rome, which came later.

“A night and a day I have spent adrift at sea.”

Paul spent twenty-four hours in the open water.

Many of these events are not recorded in Acts.

Paul's life was far harder than we often realize.

Cross References

Acts 16:22

> The crowd joined in the attack, and the officials tore the clothes off Paul and Silas and ordered them to be beaten with rods.

Acts 14:19

> Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and turned the crowd against Paul. They threw stones at him and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead.

Acts 27:41

> The ship hit a sandbar and stuck fast. The front would not move, and the back was being broken apart by the waves.

Spiritual Principle

God sustains His servants through dangers we may never fully know.

Key Truth

Paul's faith was not tested once; it was tested again and again.

XXVI. DANGERS ON EVERY SIDE

2 Corinthians 11:26 — Frequent Journeys

“I have been on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger at sea, and in danger among false brothers.”

Paul traveled thousands of miles, mostly on foot.

Danger was everywhere.

- Rivers that flooded.
- Robbers on the roads.
- His own people who opposed him.
- Gentiles who attacked him.
- Cities with angry crowds.
- The empty wilderness.
- The open sea.
- False brothers inside the church.

Notice the last one.

Some of Paul's greatest pain came from people who claimed to be believers.

Cross References

Acts 9:23

> After many days, some Jews planned together to kill Paul.

Acts 14:5

> A group of Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, planned to mistreat them and stone them.

Acts 20:3

> Paul stayed in Greece three months. When he was about to sail to Syria, some Jews made a plot against him, so he decided to go back through Macedonia.

Spiritual Principle

Faithful service may bring danger from every direction, even from within the church.

Application

Are you willing to follow Christ when it is costly?

XXVII. TOIL AND HARDSHIP

2 Corinthians 11:27 — Hunger, Thirst, and Cold

“In toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”

Paul now lists everyday hardships.

“In toil and hardship.”

He worked hard with his hands and in ministry.

“Through many sleepless nights.”

He often went without sleep.

“In hunger and thirst, often without food.”

He went without meals.

“In cold and exposure.”

He did not always have enough clothing or shelter.

This was the life of a great apostle.

Not comfort and honor, but hardship and sacrifice.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:11

> Even now we are hungry and thirsty. We do not have enough clothes. We are beaten, and we have no home.

Philippians 4:12

> I have lived with very little, and I have lived with a lot. Whether my stomach is full or empty, whether I have plenty or nothing, I have learned how to be at peace.

Acts 20:31

> So be on guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you, night and day, with tears.

Spiritual Principle

Following Christ may cost us comfort, but He is worth it.

Key Truth

The Christian life involves real cost.

XXVIII. CARE FOR ALL THE CHURCHES

2 Corinthians 11:28 — Daily Pressure

“And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

“Apart from other things.”

Paul could have listed even more.

“There is the daily pressure on me.”

Every day he felt a heavy weight.

“Of my anxiety for all the churches.”

He cared deeply for every church he had planted.

He worried about false teachers.

He prayed for their growth.

He grieved over their sin.

For Paul, this inner burden was as real as the beatings.

Cross References

Colossians 2:1

> I want you to know how hard I am working for you, for the believers in Laodicea, and for all who have never met me in person.

2 Corinthians 2:4

> I wrote to you with deep sadness and many tears. I did not want to hurt you, but to show you how much I love you.

Galatians 4:19

> My dear children, I am going through the pain of childbirth for you again until Christ is formed in you.

Spiritual Principle

True shepherds carry God's people on their hearts every day.

Application

Who has God placed on your heart to pray for daily?

XXIX. WEAK WITH THE WEAK

2 Corinthians 11:29 — Burning with Indignation

“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?”

“Who is weak, and I am not weak?”

Paul felt what other believers felt.

When someone struggled, Paul struggled with them.

“Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?”

When someone was led into sin, Paul burned inside.

He was angry at whatever caused them to fall.

Paul's love was not distant.

He shared in the pain of God's people.

Cross References

Romans 14:21

> It is better not to eat meat, drink wine, or do anything else that makes your brother or sister fall.

1 Corinthians 8:13

> If what I eat makes my brother sin, I will never eat meat again, so I will not cause him to fall.

1 Corinthians 9:22

> With people who were weak, I became weak, to win them. I have fit in with every kind of person, using every way I can to save some of them.

Spiritual Principle

Christlike love feels the struggles of others as its own.

Key Truth

A shepherd's heart hurts when the sheep are hurt.

XXX. BOASTING IN WEAKNESS

2 Corinthians 11:30 — Things That Show My Weakness

“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

Here is the turning point.

The false teachers boasted of strength.

Paul boasts of weakness.

Why?

Because his weakness shows that the power comes from God.

When a weak man accomplishes great things, God gets the glory.

This prepares for Chapter 12.

There God will tell Paul, **“My power is made perfect in weakness.”**

Cross References

2 Corinthians 12:9

> But the Lord answered me, “My kindness to you is enough. My strength shows up most clearly in your weakness.” So I am glad to talk about my weaknesses, so the power of Christ can stay on me.

2 Corinthians 12:5

> I will brag about a man like that, but I will not brag about myself except about my weaknesses.

1 Corinthians 1:27

> God picked the things the world calls foolish to put the wise to shame, and He picked the things the world calls weak to put the powerful to shame.

Spiritual Principle

Our weaknesses display God's strength.

Key Truth

God gets the most glory when His strength works through our weakness.

XXXI. GOD KNOWS I AM NOT LYING

2 Corinthians 11:31 — Blessed Forever

“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.”

Paul's list sounds almost unbelievable.

So he calls on God as his witness.

“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul names God in His relationship to Jesus.

“Who is blessed forever.”

In the middle of his defense, Paul praises God.

“Knows that I am not lying.”

Everything Paul said was true.

Cross References

Romans 1:9

> God, whom I serve with all my heart by preaching about His Son, is my witness that I always pray for you.

Galatians 1:20

> I promise you before God that what I am writing to you is true. I am not lying.

Romans 9:5

> The patriarchs belong to them, and from their family line came the Messiah as a human being. He is God over all, praised forever. Amen.

Spiritual Principle

Live so that you can call God as your witness.

Application

Could God confirm everything you say about yourself?

XXXII. DANGER IN DAMASCUS

2 Corinthians 11:32 — King Aretas

“In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city guarded in order to arrest me.”

Paul now tells a story from the very beginning of his Christian life.

Soon after his conversion, he preached Christ in Damascus.

His enemies wanted to kill him.

“The governor under King Aretas.”

Aretas was a king of the Nabateans, a people of Arabia.

“Had the city guarded in order to arrest me.”

The gates were watched day and night.

Paul was trapped.

Cross References

Acts 9:23

> After many days had passed, the Jews made plans to kill Saul.

Acts 9:24

> But Saul found out about their plan. They were watching the city gates day and night so they could kill him.

Galatians 1:17

> I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me. Instead, I went to Arabia and later went back to Damascus.

Spiritual Principle

Opposition often comes early to those who follow Christ boldly.

Key Truth

From the first days of his faith, Paul faced danger for Christ.

XXXIII. LOWERED IN A BASKET

2 Corinthians 11:33 — Escaping His Hands

“But I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.”

What a strange way to end a list of credentials.

In the Roman world, the first soldier to climb over an enemy wall received a special honor.

Paul tells about going down a wall, not up.

He was lowered in a basket like a load of goods.

He escaped in the dark.

It was a humbling moment.

But that is exactly Paul's point.

He boasts in weakness.

He did not escape by his own strength.

God rescued him through the help of others.

Cross References

Acts 9:25

> But his followers took him one night and let him down through an opening in the city wall, lowering him in a large basket.

Joshua 2:15

> Rahab's house was built into the city wall, so she let the spies down by a rope through her window.

1 Samuel 19:12

Michal let David down through a window, and he ran away and escaped.

Spiritual Principle

God's greatest servants often have humbling stories of rescue.

Key Truth

Paul's “greatest” credential was a basket and a rope, because it showed God's power, not his own.

XXXIV. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 11

1. Spiritual Faithfulness Matters

“To present you as a pure virgin to Christ.”

Principle:

Just as Eve was deceived, believers must guard against corruption and cling to Christ alone.

2. Beware of False Teachers

“Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

Principle:

Not everyone who claims to serve Christ truly does.

3. True Apostleship Is Proven in Suffering, Not Boasting

“Are they servants of Christ? I am more so.”

Principle:

Paul's hardships confirm that he was truly Christ's servant.

4. The Christian Life Involves Cost

“In toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights.”

Principle:

Paul endured danger, hunger, beatings, and persecution, yet remained steadfast.

5. Boasting Belongs in Weakness

“I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

Principle:

Our trials show God's strength and faithfulness more than our successes do.

XXXV. HOW TO RECOGNIZE FALSE TEACHERS

Verses 3–20 give warning signs.

They Lead Minds Away from Simple Devotion to Christ

“Led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion.”

They Preach Another Jesus

“Another Jesus... a different spirit... a different gospel.”

They Promote Themselves

“Super-apostles.”

They Measure Success by Impressive Appearance

They looked down on Paul's plain speech.

They Use Ministry for Gain

Paul's free preaching exposed their love of money.

They Wear a Disguise

“Disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

They Control and Exploit

“Enslaves you, exploits you, takes advantage of you.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Test every teacher by the true Jesus, the true gospel, and the fruit of their lives.

XXXVI. PAUL'S CATALOG OF SUFFERING

Verses 23–29 list what Paul endured for Christ.

Physical Punishment

- Countless beatings.
- Five times thirty-nine lashes.
- Three times beaten with rods.
- Once stoned.
- Many imprisonments.

Dangers of Travel

- Three shipwrecks.
- A night and a day adrift at sea.
- Danger from rivers and robbers.
- Danger in the city, the wilderness, and the sea.

Dangers from People

- From his own people.
- From Gentiles.
- From false brothers.

Daily Hardships

- Toil and hard work.
- Sleepless nights.
- Hunger and thirst.
- Cold and lack of clothing.

The Inner Burden

- Daily concern for all the churches.
- Feeling the weakness of others.
- Burning over those led into sin.

Key Truth

Paul's credentials were not written on paper; they were written on his body and his heart.

XXXVII. TWO KINDS OF BOASTING

This chapter contrasts the false apostles with Paul.

The False Apostles Boasted In

- Their speaking ability.
- Their background.
- Their authority over others.
- Their impressive appearance.
- Their strength.

Paul Boasted In

- His sufferings for Christ.
- His service without pay.
- His care for the churches.

- His weakness.
- His humbling escape in a basket.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The world boasts of strength; the Christian boasts of the grace that holds him up in weakness.

XXXVIII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 11 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is the Bridegroom of the Church

“I promised you in marriage to one husband... to Christ.”

He Deserves Pure Devotion

“The simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

There Is Only One True Jesus

“If someone comes and proclaims another Jesus.”

His Truth Lives in His Servants

“As surely as the truth of Christ is in me.”

His Servants Suffer for Him

“Are they servants of Christ? I am more so.”

His Father Is Blessed Forever

“The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Jesus is the only Bridegroom of the church, and He deserves a bride who loves Him with a simple and pure heart.

XXXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does Paul call his boasting “foolishness”?

Because boasting about himself went against the way of Christ, but he did it to protect the church.

Question 2

What is “godly jealousy”?

A protective love that wants God's people to belong fully to Christ.

Question 3

How did the serpent deceive Eve?

By cunning words that twisted God's word and made sin look good.

Question 4

What does “another Jesus” mean?

A Jesus who is described in a way that is different from the true Jesus of the gospel.

Question 5

Who were the “super-apostles”?

Self-promoting false teachers who had come into the Corinthian church.

Question 6

Why did Paul preach in Corinth without pay?

So no one could accuse him of greed, and so the gospel would cost them nothing.

Question 7

What does it mean that Satan masquerades as an angel of light?

He disguises evil to look good, wise, and attractive.

Question 8

How did the false teachers treat the Corinthians?

They controlled them, used them, took advantage of them, acted superior, and insulted them.

Question 9

What did Paul boast about instead of achievements?

His sufferings, hardships, and weakness for Christ.

Question 10

What was Paul's daily inner burden?

His concern and care for all the churches.

Question 11

Why does Paul end with the basket story?

It was a humbling moment that showed God's rescue, not Paul's strength.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 11 change about the way Christians live today?

2 Corinthians 11 should cause believers to live:

- Keeping a simple and pure devotion to Christ.
- Testing every teaching by the true gospel.
- Not being dazzled by impressive self-promoters.
- Recognizing that Satan disguises evil as good.
- Serving without selfish gain.
- Being willing to pay a price for following Christ.
- Carrying others on their hearts in prayer.
- Boasting in God's strength, not their own.

XL. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 11 asks several important questions.

Is My Devotion to Christ Simple and Pure?

Or has something else crept in?

Am I Testing What I Hear?

Do I compare it with God's word?

Am I Impressed by the Wrong Things?

Do I follow people because of charm or because of truth?

Can I Recognize Disguised Evil?

Am I alert to lies that look like light?

What Am I Willing to Suffer for Christ?

Or do I avoid anything costly?

Do I Carry Others on My Heart?

Who am I praying for every day?

Do I Feel the Struggles of Others?

Or am I distant from their pain?

What Do I Boast About?

My strengths, or God's grace in my weakness?

XLI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Scars, Not Trophies”

Most people keep trophies.

Certificates on the wall.

Awards on the shelf.

Titles before their names.

These things show what they have achieved.

The false teachers in Corinth had trophies.

Polished speech.

Impressive backgrounds.

Confidence and control.

Paul had scars.

Marks from whips.

Bruises from rods.

Memories of stones, storms, and sleepless nights.

And a story about a basket on a rope.

The world would choose the trophies.

But Paul's scars told the truth about whom he served.

They showed that he loved Christ more than comfort.

They showed that he loved the church more than his own safety.

And they showed that God's power had carried him through.

This creates a powerful principle.

Do not judge a servant of Christ by his trophies.

Look for the marks of faithful love.

Principle:

The true marks of a servant of Christ are not trophies of success but scars of faithfulness.

XLII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 11 is a warning and an encouragement.

It warns us about deception.

It reminds us that Satan comes disguised as light.

It calls us to a simple, pure devotion to Christ.

It shows us what a true servant looks like.

And it shows that weakness can display God's power.

2 Corinthians 11 therefore reminds us:

Never let your heart drift from simple devotion to Christ.

Never accept another Jesus or another gospel.

Never judge by outward appearance.

Never be surprised when evil looks good.

Never be ashamed of weakness that shows God's strength.

The church does not need self-promoting leaders.

It needs:

Servants with pure devotion.

Leaders who protect the flock.

Believers who will pay the price.

And hearts that boast only in God's grace.

The same Lord still calls:

Tell people about the true Jesus.

Tell people the true gospel.

Tell people that Christ is worth any cost.

Tell people that God's strength shines in our weakness.

And as you live:

Stay devoted to Christ.

Test every message.

Endure for His sake.

Boast in your weakness and His strength.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Jesus Christ, the true Bridegroom of the church.

Thank You for calling us to a simple and pure devotion to Him.

Thank You for faithful servants like Paul who suffered so the gospel could reach us.

Thank You that You see through every disguise.

Thank You that Your strength is shown in our weakness.

Thank You that You rescue Your servants in ways we could never plan.

Forgive us when our hearts have drifted from Christ.

Forgive us when we have been impressed by the wrong things.

Forgive us when we have tolerated what is false.

Forgive us when we have avoided the cost of following You.

Forgive us when we have boasted in ourselves.

Guard our minds from deception.

Help us test every teaching by Your word.

Give us courage to endure hardship for Christ.

Give us hearts that carry Your people in prayer.

And teach us to boast only in what shows Your strength.

“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But I am afraid that, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” — 2 Corinthians 11:3

Central Truth

True servants of Christ guard the church's pure devotion to Him, expose deception that comes disguised as light, and are proven not by impressive boasting but by faithful suffering and weakness through which God's strength is shown.

2 Corinthians 11 in One Sentence

Paul, jealous for the church's pure devotion to Christ, exposes the false apostles who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness just as Satan masquerades as an angel of light, and then “foolishly” boasts not in impressive achievements but in his many sufferings, his care for the churches, and his weakness.