

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1410 – March 9, 2014 – 2 Corinthians 12:11-19
Paul's Continued Defense

We're studying Paul's defense of his apostleship in 2 Corinthians 10-13. He's been engaging in a little foolishness in order to answer his opponents who boasted in things of the flesh. This was not customary for Paul but it was necessary given some of the Corinthian's propensity for carnality. To review, in 2 Cor 12:1-6 Paul was raptured to the third heaven where he heard things too holy to tell others. In verses 7-10 he was given many other revelations and in order to keep him from exalting himself because of all the revelations he was given a thorn in the flesh. No one has successfully identified the thorn to everyone's satisfaction but we can agree that it was impaled by a demon and tormented him. In verse 8, Paul had urged the Lord strongly on three occasions to remove the thorn but the Lord's reply in verse 9 was that "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Paul was glad then to boast about his afflictions because when this condition was met Christ's power took up residence in Paul in order to supply his every need. In verse 10 the logical conclusion is that Paul was well content in all afflictions on behalf of Christ because it was when he was weak that he was strong. The bottom line is that God has a plan and purpose for the suffering we experience and it may not be to take it away, but rather leave it so we will learn to depend upon Him.

Today we see in 12:11 that Paul is coming to an end of this foolishness. He says **I have become foolish**. This is a perfect tense. The perfect tense refers to a past completed action having present results. The tense is summarizing when he first became a fool in 11:1 until the present in 12:11. From here forward he will no longer be foolish. He had become foolish in that he boasted according to the flesh. And here he explains once more why he did saying, **You yourselves compelled me**. He had become foolish because they had pressed him to boast in the flesh. How had they pressed him? By accepting

the premise of the false apostles when they compared themselves with Paul. What they should have done was reject the premise. Paul, according to their standards, was not a good speaker and didn't have the right credentials. Because they accepted their standards Paul had no other recourse than to answer these fools according to their folly, even though it was a fool's errand. But since they tolerated foolishness he entertained it for their sakes, even though this was not profitable before the Lord.

In any case, by engaging in this fool's errand Paul hoped the Corinthian's would recognize three things. First, that he was superior to his opponents, even on foolish terms. For example, if they boasted in suffering for the faith, Paul could boast far more. If they boasted in visions and revelations, Paul could boast in far more. He was even given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from boasting about them. While all this was foolishness to Paul it nevertheless did show that he was superior to his opponents. Second, Paul hoped that they would recognize that boasting according to the flesh was without value. For example, he repeatedly discounted the value of boasting and even in his own boasting he removed himself from front and center by referring to himself in the 3rd person or by boasting in his weaknesses. Through this he hoped they would realize that boasting according to the flesh was vanity. Third, Paul hoped that they would recognize that his ministry was consistent with Scripture, unlike his opponents. For example, they had hit them in the face but he had humbly served them. Which behavior was consistent with the gospel? The answer was obvious.

Summarizing what Paul has done from 11:1-12:10 we repeat the principle we started with from Prov 26:5. "Answer a fool according to his folly, do not answer a fool according to his folly." The meaning of that proverb has eluded many people because it appears on the surface to be a contradiction. Do I or do I not answer a fool according to his folly? What the proverb is getting at is the two steps you take with answering a fool. The first step, answering a fool according to his folly, means that you step into the shoes of your opponent for the sake of argument and show him that on his terms, from within his worldview, there is futility, there is no answer. Every position that is not the biblical position ultimately ends in a non-answer. The second step, not answering a fool according to his folly, means that you maintain the biblical worldview and ask the fool to step into your shoes so that he can see that from within the biblical worldview there is an answer. He may not like the

answer, but there is an answer. Paul has followed and is following Prov 26:5 masterfully in his defense.

He said, "If these guys are apostles of Christ then why did they hit you in the face?" Is that consistent with the Christian worldview? No, but it is consistent with Satan. So they must be apostles of Satan. Paul then said, "If I am an apostle of Christ, wouldn't I be humble?" Yes, and he had been. So Paul must be an apostle of Christ and they must be pretenders. He used this type of argument several times. The point is that unbelief is always internally inconsistent with itself as well as contrary to the truth. Unbelief can always be demonstrated to be irrational. It just requires knowing your opponents thinking well enough to dismantle it internally as well as knowing the Scripture well enough to give a reasonable defense from that view of thinking.

This was absolutely critical since his opponents were vying for the hearts and minds of Paul's converts. If his converts continued to entertain the teachings of his opponents they would become filthy spiritually, even soiling their wedding garments so to speak, when Paul had betrothed them to one husband, that is, to Christ, and they should be preparing for that day by purifying themselves in righteousness. So Paul was compelled to give this defense, their spiritual lives were at stake. By application your spiritual lives are at stake too. There are false teachers all over the world masquerading as angels of light under philosophies and religions. Some of them are intellectual, some of them are mystical; some of them are material, some of them are natural, some of them are close to the truth and others farther away, but all of them, in the end, are false. This is why I am so protective of you and warn you of false teachers, false teachings, false emphasis, etc...I have a responsibility to keep watch over you and to shepherd the flock of God that has been allotted to my charge. And this is why I'm not overly enthused about having other influences in your life. If I'm your shepherd, then who is keeping watch over your souls, from an undershepherds point of view? It does disturb me if I find out your listening to someone or reading something and I'm familiar with the errors because my fear is Paul's fear, that you'll be led astray into these errors and wrong emphases. So I'm not overly enthused about it. I don't prohibit it but I do not condone it wholeheartedly. On the other hand, what I am overly enthused about is more prayer groups. There's only one prayer session here each week and only six people attend it. So I

encourage the formation of prayer groups at this time. I'd encourage you to think about that. What about prayer? Oh, that's too hard. We can pray about three and a half minutes and then we float off into la-la land. It's very sad.

In any case, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians were being led astray by false teachers and since they were open to them and their criticisms of Paul from the fleshly point of view Paul was compelled to give a foolish defense. But Paul says in verse 11, **Actually I should have been commended by you.** That is, the Corinthians should have stood up for Paul and commended him rather than accepting his opponent's agenda and their comparisons of themselves with him. **In no respect** Paul says, **was I inferior to the most eminent apostles,** even on their own terms as we've seen. He's using sarcasm again to refer to his opponents as those super-special apostles. It's all mocking; in reality they were false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ when in reality they were servants of Satan. In no way was Paul inferior, **even though,** he concludes, **I am a nobody.** What do you mean Paul, you are **a nobody**? He means left to himself he was **a nobody.** Paul was only somebody by the grace of God. This is how Paul highlighted the grace of God. It's the grace of God which takes us from being a nobody and transforms us into being a somebody. But left to ourselves we are nobody. Paul elsewhere tells us that he was nothing special, simply a vessel of God's mercy (Rom 9:23-24). He also tells us that left to himself he was a persecutor of the Church of God and not deserving of being an apostle (1 Cor 15:9). In another place he tells us that the life he lived he lived by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself up for him (Gal 2:20). In another place he says he did not consider his life of any account as dear to himself, but that he should testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). In short, Paul was what he was by the grace of God at work in Him (1 Cor 15:10). But left to himself he was nothing more than you or I are - left to ourselves, nobodies. The point is that Christ is everything and if we are anything it is exclusively because of the grace of God.

Verse 12, Paul now turns to not answering a fool according to his folly. In other words, he's going to answer from within the Christian worldview. He's been engaging them on foolish terms, now he will turn to Scriptural terms and here he argues that by God's grace he was an apostle and did the signs of an apostle. **The signs of a true apostle were performed among you**

with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. Now the word **signs** is used twice in this verse. The first time it is used for the “marks” of a true apostle and should be translated that way; “the marks of a true apostle were performed among you.” The second time it is used for supernatural manifestations in connection with **wonders and miracles**. “Signs,” “wonders,” and “miracles” are synonymous terms that emphasize respectively their authenticating value, astonishing effect, and divine power.”¹ Why does Paul bring up these marks of his apostleship? We must infer that his opponents had done false signs and wonders and miracles. Since signs always carry an authenticating value then his opponent’s signs also authenticated them. The only question is who did their signs point to as the one behind their signs, wonders and miracles? Satan can do signs, wonders and miracles too. Don’t be deceived into thinking that all signs, wonders and miracles are of God. Satan is an angel of light and he masquerades to counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles. When Moses did true signs in Egypt what did Pharaoh’s sorcerers do? False signs that counterfeited the true. Can Satan do signs then? You better believe it. How then can you distinguish the true from the false? First, and most importantly, by listening to their teaching. This means being a Berean and carefully investigating their teachings. Many false teachings are close to the truth but are not the truth. Therefore careful Bible study must be undertaken to understand truth. It takes me 12 or more hours to study the few verses I teach each Sunday. If you think you can look at a passage and digest it and comprehend it in 30 minutes you are extremely naïve. True, you can read through the Bible and get a general idea of what it teaches. But truth claims from the Bible must be investigated thoroughly. This takes a lot of time, a disciplined method and discipline. So if someone does some miraculous thing, wait a minute, that’s not an automatic authentication that they are a messenger of God. The teaching has to be evaluated because a true messenger of God always speaks orthodoxy. Second, and this is lesser, more of an observation really, but that is that God’s miracles are always qualitatively greater than Satan’s miracles. Moses’ miracle of Aaron’s staff turning into a snake was evidenced as superior to Pharaoh’s magician’s miracles when they turned their staffs into snakes by the fact that Moses’ snake ate up their snakes. The theme pervades each contest in the Book of Exodus until Pharaoh’s magicians can’t do what Moses could do. Daniel’s ability to interpret dreams was superior to Nebuchadnezzar’s conjurers who used their secret books to string together phony interpretations. In the same

way Paul's miracles were superior to those of the false apostles. However, the superiority of God's miracles over Satan's in all these cases is predicated on the fact that the two were going on side by side so you could do a comparison. If you don't have that, you can't tell. Satan's miracles can and do confuse people into thinking they are coming from God. So ultimately it goes back to Scripture and what does the miracle worker teach, not what can the miracle teacher do. Only if someone is orthodox and does a miracle are they authenticated by God as a true apostle. But since the purpose of miracles was to authenticate an apostle in order to write authoritative Scripture and the canon is closed there are no such signs being done today. But it was happening when Paul was at Corinth in AD50-51. Paul says in verse 12 that he did such signs **with all perseverance**, probably meaning in abundance even though none of them are mentioned in Luke's account of Paul's ministry in Corinth in Acts 18. Other passages in Luke's Acts, however, do record Paul's miracles. Paul healed a lame man and exorcized a demon and encountered and defeated a sorcerer and raised a dead man. All these miracles authenticated Paul because Paul taught orthodoxy.

PETER	PAUL
Heals a lame man (Acts 3:2ff)	Heals a lame man (Acts 14:8)
Exorcizes a demon (Acts 5:16)	Exorcizes a demon (Acts 16:18)
Encounters and defeats a sorcerer (Acts 8:18ff)	Encounters and defeats a sorcerer (Acts 13:6ff)
Raises a dead girl (Acts 9:36ff)	Raises a dead man (Acts 20:9ff)

Of course, Peter and the rest of the twelve apostles also were authenticated by miracles (Acts 2:43 and 5:12). There were even a few beyond the twelve who did miracles; Stephen, Philip, Ananias and possibly Timothy. The difficulty with verse 12 is explaining how anyone outside of an apostle could do signs, miracles and wonders if they are the marks of an apostle? Probably the best way to explain it is to recognize that if someone had been in the presence of an apostle the apostle could bestow the ability upon them by the laying on of hands. In Acts 8 Simon wanted Peter to give him this gift. Other passages support the transitional truth that an apostle could transfer a spiritual ability to someone else through the laying on of hands. Paul said to the Romans, "I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you..." This does not deny that spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit. It only affirms that some spiritual gifts were given by the Holy Spirit through

the apostles in the 1st century. Those whom the apostle's imparted spiritual gifts then became apostolic deputies who could extend the apostle's ministry. The fact that the gifts were imparted by apostles through the laying on of hands does not negate the truth that the spiritual gifts were given by the Holy Spirit; they were, but through the apostles. Significantly none of these apostolic deputies ever bestowed the ability upon others so there is no argument here for apostolic succession or a continuation of the sign gifts through the laying on of hands. The testimony is that signs, miracles and wonders were done by apostles as an authentication and on rare occasions were transferred to deputies through the laying on of hands in order to extend the apostle's ministry. Paul's point in verse 12 is that he had done many signs, wonders and miracles among the Corinthians and these were true marks of his apostleship. They should therefore accept his authority as an apostle of Christ.

In verse 13 Paul continues to defend his behavior toward them in contrast to his opponents. He says, **For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!** Paul is sarcastic. Paul normally treated every church the same and he did so at Corinth with one exception, namely, he **did not become a burden to** them, meaning he did not accept financial remuneration from them. Normally, Paul did receive financial remuneration from churches but Paul had refused this when he first went to Corinth because of their immature state. He continued to refuse it because they remained immature. His opponents however, required it! In this he and they were very different. If they considered this wrong of Paul then he says, **Forgive me!** Paul is, of course, being sarcastic, but probably Paul's opponents had put a spin on Paul's refusal to receive financial support from them by arguing that Paul thought he was too good for their money or he was holding out for the collection he was coming to receive so he could cash in all at one time. In any case, such a statement reveals Paul's innocence in the matter.

In verse 14 Paul reveals that he is coming to them a third time. **Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.** Paul mentions a **third** imminent visit. His first visit is recorded in

Acts 18. The year was AD50-51. On this visit he evangelized and followed up with training for over a year and a half. His second visit is mentioned in 2 Cor 1-2 and 7. The year was probably ~ AD55. On this visit he was insulted by a man in the congregation and so left quickly and wrote the severe letter. His third visit is revealed here and he says **I am ready to come to you**. There was nothing hindering Paul from coming so this was an imminent visit, everything was prepared. When he comes he says, **I will not be a burden to you**. This means he would not accept financial remuneration this time either. He gives two reasons for not accepting money on this third visit. First, because **I do not seek what is yours, but you**. Paul didn't want their money, the very charge the false apostles likely leveled at him. Instead he wanted them, meaning he wanted them to love him and to accept his apostleship so that they could follow the word of God and be found faithful and true to the One husband he had betrothed them to, that is to Christ, when they appeared at the judgment seat of Christ. Second, **for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children**. Paul is taking the truth from physical family that parents have the responsibility to save up for their children and not the other way around, and making application to the spiritual family. Paul was their spiritual parent in the sense that he was the first to bring the gospel to them when they believed and he then spent time training them. Because of this he was to save up for them and not them for him. He would therefore not receive financial payment from them on this third visit.

Instead, verse 15, **I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls**. Paul would give himself to them and be expended for them. The Greek word **soul** refers to the "life" or "livelihood." Paul is saying he would spend his life and livelihood in order to better their life and livelihood. He would even **be expended for** their souls in the sense that he would allow them to use him if that in fact would benefit their life or livelihood. Paul is like the Savior who spent His life for us and expended His life for us on the cross. He is an imitator of Christ and this is what it means to truly imitate Him. If we are to imitate Him we must be selfless not selfish. It was an evidence of Paul's love.

As he says, **If I love you more, am I to be loved less?** The obvious answer is no, but unfortunately in the circumstances he was **loved less**. Paul loved them much more than they loved him. As early as chapter 7 he was urging

them to open their heart to him and close it off to his opponents. Verse 16, **But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit.** Regardless of their lack of love for him, he did not burden them himself, though his opponents did imply. Was Paul then a **crafty fellow** who **took** them in **by deceit**? This must reflect a charge against him by his opponents. But if Paul had taken them in by deceit then why did he not burden them with paying him fees? What his opponents charged was incompatible with the true state of affairs. Paul was not acting like a crafty fellow, deceiving them. Paul was straightforward with them.

Verse 17, **Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?** The shift now turns to those like Titus and others Paul sent in his stead. **Certainly**, Paul says, I didn't **take advantage of you through** them, **have I?** Implied is he had not but let the facts speak for themselves.

Verse 18, **I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?** Implied is they had. **Titus, the brother** and Paul had all conducted themselves in an identical manner, consistent with the Christian faith. None of them had **taken any advantage** of them. They had all gone to them without any financial remuneration. They had all treated them fairly. They had, in fact, all spent and been expended for them. Everything was done with great discretion. How could they be charged with any wrong doing?

All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. And that would be what we all have been thinking. It was written to give that idea. And it has been a defense, an apologetic, but the Corinthian's were not the main audience Paul was defending himself before. **Actually**, Paul says, **it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.** The main audience was **God** and that is the goal of all ministry, to speak plainly **in the sight of God** as those in Christ. To speak **in the sight of God** is to speak fully cognizant that God is watching every word you say. It is to be ever watchful of the things you say because He is listening and you want to please Him. Through that the saints are built up. Notice how Paul refers to them as **beloved**. This

is the summary concept of the Christian life, to love one another, the reciprocal love of me loving you and you loving me. This is what makes us distinct from the world. This is the way, Christ said, that they will know that you are my disciples, by your love for one another. Love within the body of believers. A love that sets us apart from the world.

In summary today, in verse 11 Paul wraps up answering a fool according to his folly. He had been compelled to do this because of their acceptance of his opponent's fleshly agenda. All along he should have been commended by them rather than compelled to engage in this fleshly endeavor. He was in no respect inferior to these super-special wanna-be apostles, even though left to himself he was a nobody. Paul was what he was and you are what you are solely by the grace of God. Verse 12, Paul had been authenticated as a true apostle among them doing supernatural signs in abundance. In verse 13 Paul had treated them the same as all the other churches, except he did not accept financial remuneration from them. If this was wrong then please forgive me he says. In verse 14 he was ready for a third visit and he would not accept financial remuneration from them on this trip either. The reason was to prove that he did not want their money but them to be dedicated to Christ. Further, as their spiritual parent it was his responsibility to save up for them, not them for him. In verse 15 he was glad to spend and be expended for their life and livelihood. This was merely walking in the path of the Savior who spent and was expended for us on the cross. If Paul loved them, was he to be loved any less in return? By no means. But, verse 16, that was the way it was. He did not charge them to preach and teach, yet, was he truly a crafty fellow trying to deceive them? Certainly he had not taken advantage of them any more than any of those he had sent to them. Verse 18 Titus and a brother had come to them and they didn't take advantage of them. No, they all conducted themselves in the same manner of living. All of them came free of charge. Verse 19, had Paul been pre-eminently defending himself to them? No, primarily his defense was one that was in the sight of God in order to show that he feared God and spoke as if he were in His sight at all times, as a secondary effect however, it would build them up.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, any defense of the faith must precede in two steps. First, answering a fool according to his folly. That is, accepting his terms of the debate for the sake of argument, in order to show the futility of unbelief. Francis Schaeffer used to do this marvelously. He understood

men and how they thought. He likened men to hiding in their self-constructed houses where they feel safe inside. In argument he would remove the roof from the house exposing their foolishness. Then the man realized that he had a need and in that vacuum he would give the answer. For example, why does the materialist scientist love? Love is inconsistent with materialism. Love would be reduced in that worldview to molecules bouncing around in one's head. Yet the scientist still goes home and loves his wife! How do you give an account for real love in a materialist scientific worldview? You can't. And this shows that it is not the correct worldview. The Christian worldview can easily account for love and science since God is love and we are made in God's image and we live in a partially material world and so we can use science to discover more about the creative handiwork of God. Paul did this, Schaeffer did this and we need to learn to master this technique in our encounters with unbelief. Expose foolishness for foolishness in order to create a void. Second, do not answer a fool according to his folly. That is, ask him to step into your shoes for the sake of argument and show him that the Christian worldview makes sense of all the data, it fills the void. Political sound bytes are not going to correct this country. People need to know they are living in the futility of their own minds and that Christianity is the answer.

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