
Genuine Proof in Ministry Authenticity

2 Corinthians 11:16-33¹³

Russ Kennedy

Many things come with stamps or seals of authenticity...

There are many fakes of genuine articles. I have seen many, many examples of this in the market places in China...

How do we know if what we are hearing, seeing and reading is real news or fake news?

What seals of authenticity do you trust? Foods? Medicines? Replacement parts for your car?

What made New Testament ministry authentic?

How did Jesus authenticate His ministry?

How did the Apostles?

What about the fakes and charlatans and super-apostles?

This section opens with biting irony that asks for them to bear with...

Bear with my foolishness (v. 1)

I am jealous over you...

Accept me as fool (v. 16)

I will boast for you...

Is there such a thing as Biblical boasting????

The glory wall...

The ministry bio...

The pastoral promotion...

Well there is certainly sinful boasting. That is usually easy to identify. There is a kind of culturally accepted boasting. That was expected in Paul's day. Boasting in his day was commonly accepted, particularly from those who were prominent. Everyone proclaimed their greatness. It was not only ok, but something was wrong if you didn't. The Super-Apostles, the ultra-ministers all had their boast, their promotion. Paul was viewed with suspicion because he eschewed it. So the question was, "How can he be important if he never boasts?"

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His Attitude (v. 16-21a)

Really here we have page two of Paul's "foolishness". In the first his foolishness was his relationship and responsibility to the church at Corinth. Now he continues...

¹⁶ I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. ¹⁷ What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. ¹⁸ Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. ¹⁹ For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! ²⁰ For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. ²¹ To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

A Desire that Appeals (v. 16-17)

He really does not want people to think of him as a fool. Their "foolishness" undermines Paul's authentic ministry. They may make that evaluation. But it is not really true. If they think he is a fool, then they should accept him as a fool. Let him do what to him is a foolish thing. To them, it is a normal thing.

When he is speaking as a fool he is not talking like the Lord would. They have to understand that if he stoops to their cultural and personal level, he is not doing what the Lord would do. So boasting, even when it is accepted culturally, is not virtuous. Culture does not get to determine right from wrong. Some things are always wrong.

Paul is not so much looking at a command from the Lord. He is more looking at the pattern of the Lord. Cultural self-proclamation would have been the norm in Jesus' day. But he not only didn't do it, but often restrained and even commanded others not to. With this caveat, he wants them to hear him and weigh what he is saying...

A Sarcasm that Cuts (v. 18-20)

Now Paul affirms that he will be like everyone else and boast in a fleshly way. You have to pause a little and ask, "Really?" If you usually won't and Jesus left us a pattern of not boasting, not self-promoting, then, what is Paul doing? Now he puts this in the category of "foolishness." Is that the solution to conundrum? Boasting about one's spiritual accomplishments may be foolish, but it isn't sin. These few sentences considered alone by some commentators want to make their heads explode. So many were boasting like the world, in the flesh. Therefore, Paul is justified in doing the same thing.

You think you are so smart that you bear with this kind of foolishness. The church was willing to put with almost anything. Because the super-apostles were accepted, then the church put up with some of the most sinful, dangerous and destructive behavior. That they were willing to accept this kind of abuse just because a person had the credentials was put forward as a mark of their wisdom. Paul's sarcasm is biting and cutting.

An Exclamation that Transitions (v. 21)

Two words are connected for Paul: shame and weak. To his shame, he is too weak for... what? Well, to be the kind of spiritual abuser that the super-apostles were. What an irony. But it also is meant as a transition. You are dazzled by power; we are dying in sacrifice.

Listen to what he is saying. I am not a fool. But I will speak as a fool. When I act and speak like a fool, you listen to me. So as this fool you expect me to be, I will confidently boast in a fleshly way like the rest of the super-apostles.

His Accomplishments (v. 21b-29)

So, now it is time for Paul to boast...

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

His Jewish Heritage (v. 21b-22)

Paul first in his Jewish heritage. He does so over against their boasts. Now this sounds like three different categories - Hebrews, Israelites, offspring of Abraham. But in the flesh, in the world this is the same. Spiritually, they wouldn't even qualify as true Israel and true sons of Abraham since they may be unbelievers.

Why is this important? Because they were questioning whether Paul really had the credentials to be an Apostle. They were proclaiming their Jewish roots and rights. They were the first to come to Christ. They had all the Old Testament truths. Maybe Paul was not really a true Jew?

His Ministry Honors (v. 23-27)

Now comes his boasting. Here are his ministry accomplishments. Here is what he was going to promote and proclaim

There comes a recitation of his dangers, his trials, his beatings, his sufferings. This is what Christian boasting, even the foolish boasting is in. IT is a cross-kind of boasting. It values suffering and sacrifice. Instead of lauding his crowing achievements, he lists his terrible sufferings.

Paul is turning boasting on its head. Paul has a list of spiritual accomplishments he could have given. I am sure that the church was now ready to hear his triumphs. Instead, they hear his trials, tribulations and troubles. This is still foolish. But it is what a servant, a saint values.

I am going to be quite blunt here. What do you admire in a Christian leader? What do you look for in an elder? How should a Christian resume for ministry look? What qualifies a person for my role on the eldership?

Educational credentials?

Are they published?

Recommended by respected people?

Thickness of their *curricula vitae*?

But what about asking questions like:

Suffering?

Trials?

Challenges?

Opposition?

Obviously, I am posing an artificial this-or-that. But it does strike me that we often look for elders in one way with one set of qualifications and for “preachers” with very different. Staff pastoring can be all about job descriptions, ministry experiences, academic qualifications, personality and so on. While these things may be a part of wisdom, we must NEVER function according to the world. The Biblical qualifications must come first and be fully met. But the kind of “acceptable” Christian boasting must not be solicited and if offered, must be rejected.

Listen to one helpful writer summarizing this section for us.

Paul’s list of ‘accomplishments’ (verses 22–33) is the longest of three such lists in 2 Corinthians, though only here does he boast, in detail, of what had happened to him. He begins by stating that he worked much harder, had been in prison more frequently and flogged more severely than his opponents (verse 23). Those ‘super-apostles’, who surpass him in all things, say he is a fool. He agrees with them but claims to be more than a fool, in fact to be out of his mind (verse 23). Let them see how mad he really is. He has been exposed to death again and again (verse 23), giving examples of flogging, rod-beating, stoning, shipwreck, and being adrift at sea (verses 24–25). In his many journeys there have been numerous dangers in crossing rivers, evading robbers, escaping from enemies – Jew and Gentile alike (verse 26). He has laboured and toiled and ... often gone without sleep; he has known hunger and thirst and ... often gone without food; he has been cold and naked (verses 27–28). And day by day there has been the anxiety for the churches – not least the Corinthian church! (Barnett, pp. 173-174)

His Pastoral Responsibilities (v. 28-29)

²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

While the elite ministers are worried about their standing in the church, Paul is anxious about the church's walk with Christ. HE The want to be over the church. He suffers with the church. They are quick to judge the weak and struggling. He is poised to engage and defend. Who will them fall? The ultra-ministers. Therefore, Paul's indignation when he was with them and in this letter.

His Assertion (v. 30-33)

Now, a closing explanation...

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

A Biblical Principle (v. 30)

Biblical boasting turns the world's boasting on its head. If forced to, ironically speaking, Paul will boast in the things that show his weakness. We are not talking about bragging about the things we don't do well. Rather, we speak of the determination to steady serving in sacrificial suffering.

A Divine Witness (v. 31)

Evidently his rehearsal of these many and varied troubles and sufferings have been met with skepticism and denial. He has been called a liar. He may have been accused of exaggerating. What he rehearses as having experienced in 10 years of ministry is hard to believe. But God is his witness. God knows. Paul is telling the truth.

A Humiliating Example (v. 32-33)

Want to know how weak Paul was? At the beginning of his Christian life. He had a humiliating experience. Under the pressure of the governor of Damascus, Paul was hidden in a large wicker basket and let down over the wall to escape with his life.

Can any super-apostle say this? Can any ultra-minister tell such a story? And even if they had such happen to them, would they say so? No. Paul marvelous at the preserving and protecting care of God as he huddled in basket. This is the boasting of weakness.

Reflect and Respond

Paul's boasting...

He was imprisoned often (11:23a).

He was whipped times without number (11:23b).

He received 39 lashes from the Jews on five occasions (11:24).

He was beaten with rods on three occasions (11:25a).

He faced death time and again (11:23c).

He faced danger from flooded rivers (11:26b).

He faced danger from robbers (11:26c).

He faced danger from both Jewish and Gentile mobs (11:26d).

He was stoned once (11:25b).

He was shipwrecked three times (11:25c).

He spent a terror-filled night and day on the open sea (11:25d).

He traveled many weary miles (11:26a).

He spent sleepless nights (11:27a).

He knew constant hunger and thirst (11:27b).

He was often cold and ill-clothed (11:27c).

He experienced harrowing escapes (11:32-33).

He bore daily the burden for the many churches he had started (11:28-31).

What do you boast in?

Is it good for us that most of us have had little experience of such? Are we so used to the world's self-promotion that we adopt it for ourselves? Just look at the inside or back jacket of almost any current prominent Christian leader... Enough said.

Beloved, I have detected in my own heart a tendency to self-congratulation and prideful solicitation. Of these God has granted repentance. May God's spirit grant humility before God's providences have to bring humiliation.

May God grant us as a church a prizing of the crucified life and the sacrificial ministry. May we love when our leaders are affirmed by the hardship they endure rather than the acclaim they receive.