



2 Corinthians - Chapter Eleven

III 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:10 - Paul's Appeal to the Rebellious Minority in Corinth (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eleven

Paul asks the Corinthians to indulge him playing the fool for three key reasons:

1. His divine jealousy for the Corinthians' purity in Christ.
2. Their willingness to put up with an aberrant message.
3. That Paul is in no way inferior to his rivals.

Paul goes on in vv.6-12 to deal with two specific areas of inferiority that his opponents have pointed to: his speaking ability and his refusal to ask for their financial support. Paul's tone is severe, labelling these imposters as super-apostles and charging them with making proclamations of another Jesus, a different Spirit and a different Gospel to the ones he taught. At the same time Paul elevates the Corinthians for accepting the true Gospel. Their elevation was made possible by Paul's own lowering.

Following an attack on the style of leadership of the false apostles and the lack of wisdom shown by the church in accepting them, Paul goes on to list his own ministerial achievements and sufferings. The list includes heritage (v.22), service record (vv.23-25), dangers and deprivations (vv.26-27), pastoral concerns (v.28), and daring escapades (vv.31-33). The basic categories are, undoubtedly, not those of Paul's own choosing. Since he was forced into this exercise in futility, one can be fairly sure that these categories were prompted by the claims of his opponents and the expectations of the Corinthians.

III.b 2 Corinthians 11:1-15 - Paul and the False Apostles

This section makes it clear just how much of a threat to the church in Corinth he viewed his opponents to be. The way he sets out his argument against them is not for any personal reasons; he is clearly concerned as their pastor.

Paul refused to accept money from the Corinthians because it was imperative that he distinguish his ministry from that of the false apostles who laboured in Corinth out of greed, unlike Paul: <<***For we are not peddlers of God's word like so***>>
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many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence>> (2 Corinthians 2:17), or were looking for an opportunity to lead the church from a position of personal power. They claimed to be messengers of light, i.e. truth and salvation, but they were masquerading their true origin and destiny, Satan and hell respectively.

¹ I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ² I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:1-2

I feel a divine jealousy for you. As their spiritual father in the faith, Paul feels the same divine, i.e. godlike jealousy, that a father experiences towards his daughter: <<*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me*>> (Exodus 20:5), and: <<*For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God*>> (Deuteronomy 4:24).

The Greek word zelos, translated jealousy here, is used for the Corinthians zeal for Paul as reported to him by Titus: <<*and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more*>> (2 Corinthians 7:7). As with: <<*O Lord, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed. Let the fire for your adversaries consume them*>> (Isaiah 26:11), it is easy to understand why jealousy and zeal are divinely linked and not intended here as a human failing.

I promised you in marriage to one husband. In Jewish culture it was the father's responsibility to commit at his daughter's betrothal that he would present her as a chaste virgin for her wedding; refer also to Deuteronomy 22:13-24 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. In a similar way, the OT spoke of God's people as his betrothed: <<*For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called*>> (Isaiah 54:5), <<*And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy*>> (Hosea 2:19).

Here the promise in marriage was the Corinthians' conversion through Paul's ministry, the husband is Christ, and the wedding day will be the day of Christ's return: <<*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also*>> (John 14:3), <<*he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him*>> (Colossians 1:22), and: <<*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the*

marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, 'These are true words of God'>> (Revelation 19:6-9). Paul's picture of the church as engaged to Christ: <<*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish*>> (Ephesians 5:25-27), carries on the OT view of Israel as betrothed to God.

³ But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3

As the serpent deceived Eve. As at the time of Eve's fall in the garden, recorded in Genesis 3:1-13, the serpent's, i.e. Satan's cunning, now represented by Paul's opponents, consists in calling into question the sufficiency of God's provisions and the truth of his Word, which is now focused in Christ.

It should be noted that Paul usually although not always talks about Adam in relation to the fall: <<*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned*>> (Romans 5:12), and certainly God held him to be more responsible than Eve when he announced their punishment; refer to Genesis 3:14-19. However, since Paul is talking about the church as a bride, it seems appropriate to keep the female theme consistent in his argument.

Paul's opponents were threatening to rob the Corinthians of their pure devotion, seeking to lure them away from fidelity to their betrothed. Paul's fear that their thoughts may somehow be led astray was well founded. These men had come to Corinth and were successfully depriving Christ of a loyalty that is rightfully his. It is likely that only a small number had become prey to the intruders' ploys at the time Paul wrote, but there was the real danger that the church as a whole might be carried along, as Paul's use of the second-person plural pronoun makes clear.

The Genesis Chapter 3 account of how the serpent deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit serves as a ready illustration of what Paul fears is going on at Corinth: <<*and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor*>> (1 Timothy 2:14). Eve's thorough deception is attributed to the serpent's cunning, which he has demonstrated throughout the world ever since and will do until the end: <<*The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him*>> (Revelation 12:9). In the NT it refers to someone who uses his ability unscrupulously and resorts to trickery and slyness.

⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.

2 Corinthians 11:4

For if someone comes suggests outsiders rather than opponents within the Corinthian congregation itself. Whether the singular someone points to the group's ringleader, or is a generic reference to the group as a whole is debated. The fact that Paul speaks of his opponents as 'they' before and after this verse makes the latter the likely option. It appears that the intruders came to Corinth of their own accord, rather than being sent at another church's behest, and that they preached a message that the church has readily received, you submit to it readily enough. Unfortunately, it is not the message Paul had proclaimed to them. Herein lies the difficulty. There is something defective about their preaching – so much so that Paul labels it different, Greek *allon*.

The instrument of Satan's deception is the opponents' preaching of another Jesus, i.e. instead of the Jesus proclaimed by Paul; a different spirit, that is, not the Holy Spirit but some false, legalistic or demonic spirit; and a different Gospel, rather than the Gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone. The Gospel of Paul's opponents may have promised everyone health and prosperity without the suffering or sacrifice, contrary to Paul's message and experiences as a new covenant minister. For Paul, faith is built on one thing, and one thing alone: <<***For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ***>> (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Verse 4 is one of the most scrutinised verses in the whole of Chapters 10–13. Mainly this is due to its perceived importance in identifying the Corinthian intruders and their teaching. In reality, though, the clues are few in number, and the terse 'another Jesus, different spirit, different Gospel' does not offer much help. Nevertheless, the triad is disturbing. As is typical of much false teaching in the church that has been seen throughout the centuries, the language of Paul's rivals has a very familiar ring to it. Yet what they mean by Jesus, spirit and Gospel is so radically opposite to what Paul preached that nothing will do but to call it a different message.

The Galatians had faced a similar situation: <<***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!***>> (Galatians 1:6-9); although there it was Jewish Christians who were attempting to make them proselytes.

They are perhaps talking glibly about Jesus; they are claiming the power of the spirit; they are enthusiastic about the Gospel - but there is a subtle and all-important difference between their Jesus, their spirit, their Gospel, and the true ones. The true Jesus was the one who suffered unspeakably. The true Spirit is the one who groans within the suffering of the world. The true Gospel is the message of the crucified Lord. And the teachers who have come to Corinth after Paul left have been quietly toning down this hard, rough edge of the Gospel. It did not fit with their social and cultural aspirations. It did not

sound so good in terms of rhetorical style. In particular, it did not give them the reputation and status they are hoping for.

⁵ I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶ I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.

2 Corinthians 11:5-6

Paul was probably using a sarcastic title to describe these super-apostles who were troubling the Corinthian church, by preaching ‘another Jesus’ and ‘a different Gospel’. Paul refers to them with this title again: <<*I have been a fool! You forced me to it. Indeed you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing*>> (2 Corinthian 12:11).

Some commentators believe these men were representatives of the apostles in Jerusalem or, less likely, some of the first apostles themselves. There is no historical or biblical evidence to support any of the Twelve serving in Corinth. In addition, Paul is always respectful when referring to this eminent group of men and would not use the term in a derogatory fashion towards them.

Although Paul may have been unskilled or untrained in speech, i.e. lacking formal training in rhetoric: <<*For Christ did not send me to baptise but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power*>> (1 Corinthians 1:17), his knowledge of the Gospel greatly surpassed that of his opponents, who added nothing of value to what he had taught the Corinthians; indeed they were misleading them. It was the same in Galatia: <<*As for those who were held in high esteem – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favouritism – they added nothing to my message*>> (Galatians 2:6 NIV).

In every way and in all things we have made this evident to you. Paul’s authenticity was in the consistency of the message he brought and its outcomes in establishing the church. His opponents may have duped the church with their fine speech making and promises but their message was empty of the truth.

Putting all of this together, it is a reasonable conjecture that Paul’s rivals were Palestinian Jews who, claiming the backing of the Jerusalem church, came to Corinth carrying letters of reference and sporting an impressive array of credentials, such as visions, ecstatic experiences and revelations. They sought to sway their audience through polished delivery and powerful oratory. They combined this with an outward show of the Spirit, appealing to the prominent role of the miraculous in Jesus’ ministry. The intruders’ focus on the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, compelling rhetoric and Jesus the miracle worker may well be what Paul cryptically refers to as ‘another Jesus, different spirit and Gospel’.

It is not that authentic manifestations of the Spirit are to be rejected. Paul himself demonstrated such gifts in his own work, as did the other true apostles. However, the role of the miraculous was to validate, not displace, the Gospel; and persuasion functioned to convince that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. By focusing attention on what he was saying and not on how he

said it, Paul prevented his listeners from getting distracted from what was truly important: <<*Jesus Christ and him crucified*>> (1 Corinthians 2:2b).

As a Pharisaic Jew Paul would have received training in rhetoric during his youth in Tarsus and later during his training by Gamaliel in Jerusalem: <<*I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today*>> (Acts 22:3). However, he had no interest in developing this skill or using it for it would detract from his message, and therefore Paul claimed not to be trained in it.

⁷ Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge?

2 Corinthians 11:7

Paul's practice of self-support in Corinth, so that he proclaimed God's good news free of charge for the sake of the Corinthians, which exalted them, was a humbling experience for Paul because it entailed, not only physical suffering as a result of his hard work and insufficient earnings as an itinerant craftsman, but also the cultural disdain that the upper classes had for manual labourers: <<*To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day*>> (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). In Judaism, manual labour was not denigrated. In fact, it was part of Paul's training as a Pharisee that he should be able to support himself through some form of manual labour.

Paul had earned his living as a tent maker while in Greece to support himself and his team: <<*After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together – by trade they were tentmakers*>> (Acts 18:1-3). It was only when Timothy and Silas arrived with gifts from the Macedonian churches that Paul could devote his full time to evangelism: <<*When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus*>> (Acts 18:5).

⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way. ¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.

2 Corinthians 11:8-10

I robbed other churches is an example of hyperbole. Paul received financial help from the Macedonian churches to preach the Gospel in Corinth. It came at no cost
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to the Corinthians for the Macedonians were willing to make the sacrifice with no material gain for themselves: <<*You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone*>> (Philippians 4:15).

It seems that Paul never took money from the church in the city where he was currently working but was willing to receive support once he had moved on, so that he could continue the work of taking the Gospel to new places without the risk of alienating the new church with demands for financial support. However, there is no evidence that he ever asked for or received support from Corinth after he had left them. Perhaps it was a matter of principle given their attitude to him in not accepting payment for his ministerial work.

Another aspect worthy of consideration is that the relationship changes when a person moves from being a volunteer in the church to being a salaried staff member. The person then often feels obligated to follow the dictates of the church which may conflict with where the Lord is leading them. Paul may have viewed this as a problem had he accepted financial reward for they may have tried to pressure him into toning down his message in return for money.

Macedonia includes northern Greece, where Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea are located; whereas the regions of Achaia encompass part of southern Greece, where Corinth is situated.

As the truth of Christ is in me. Paul taught only the Gospel message: <<*I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit*>> (Romans 9:1); he did so consistently, boldly and with authority!

This boast of mine will not be silenced. As in just about every city Paul visited he proclaimed openly the Gospel of Jesus and met with severe opposition for doing so. Corinth was no different: <<*But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal*>> (Acts 18:12).

¹¹ And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! ¹² And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognised as our equals in what they boast about. ¹³ For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:11-13

And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! Paul's opponents clearly had been saying that Paul had snubbed the church by refusing payment, seen as a snub by many, and therefore did not have love for them. Paul argued from the opposite position that he was willing to forego his right to payment in order not to be a burden because he loved them! In fact, he was willing to die in order to demonstrate the strength of his love for them: <<*I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together*>> (2 Corinthians 7:3).

What I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognised as our equals in what they boast

about. Paul intended to continue to proclaim the Gospel free of charge, his main boast. Paul had recently written that the person who wants to boast should boast in the Lord (10:17). In Paul's case, though, the intent is not to draw attention to himself but to undercut the boasting of the Corinthian intruders who wanted to be considered his equals in the ministry.

For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers. This is one of Paul's most damning descriptions of these men. Just as there had been false prophets alongside the true prophets of God in OT times: <<*The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, 'Look, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king; let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favourably.'* But Micaiah said, 'As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak'>> (1 Kings 22:13-14), and: <<*An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?*>> (Jeremiah 5:30-31), so too it was known there would arise false teachers who would try to mislead the church: <<*There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision*>> (Titus 1:10).

Disguising themselves as apostles of Christ lends support to the argument these were not members of the Twelve.

There was plenty of warning about such people: <<*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves*>> (Matthew 7:15), <<*False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect*>> (Mark 13:22), <<*If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch'? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence*>> (Colossians 2:20-24), <<*I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith*>> (1 Timothy 1:3-4), <<*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned. And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced against them long ago, has not been idle, and their destruction is not asleep*>> (2 Peter 2:1-3), <<*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world*>> (1 John 4:1), and: <<*Yet in the same way these dreamers also defile the flesh, reject authority, and slander the glorious ones*>> (Jude 8).

¹⁴ And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

¹⁵ So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds.

2 Corinthians 11:14-15

Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Satan was created by God as Lucifer, which means ‘the morning star’, a source of light; he was created in perfection. It was only later that this powerful angel fell from grace through his pride and a lust for power; seeking equality with God he was cast down from heaven. Here, Paul indicates that, although what was light became darkness, it has the power to deceive by appearing like light in its ministers.

His ministers. Paul had ironically called his opponents super-apostles, then identified them as false apostles but now goes much further by naming them as Satan’s ministers. They had accused Paul falsely and, since Satan was well known as being the accuser, then Paul linked their falsehood to the devil’s service. Just as the accuser will be defeated: *<<Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God>>* (Revelation 12:10), Paul knows he must defeat his accusers here for the sake of the church he loves.

Disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Paul’s opponents, in claiming to be apostles, must also claim to be what Paul truly is, a minister, Greek *diakonos*, of the new covenant, with its ministry, Greek *diakonia*, of righteousness.

Paul frequently taught that judgment will match one’s deeds, *<<For he will repay according to each one’s deeds>>* (Romans 2:6), *<<If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple>>* (1 Corinthians 3:17), *<<For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil>>* (2 Corinthians 5:10), *<<Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up>>* (Galatians 6:7-9), *<<Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free>>* (Ephesians 6:7-8), *<<For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things>>* (Philippians 3:18-19), *<<Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ>>* (Colossians 3:23-24), and: *<<Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds>>* (2 Timothy 4:14).

III.c 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 - Paul's Sufferings as an Apostle

The term fool is literally unwise and refers to someone who lacks sense or reason. It is not someone who is stupid or witless but rather someone whose self-perceptions are blown all out of proportion. The distinction is an important one. While Paul considers what he is about to do is sheer folly, the act of boasting, nevertheless, what he is about to say is far from foolish. For if he chooses to boast, he would not be a fool like his rivals because he would be speaking the truth.

Although forced to boast by his opponents, and after a long justification of his doing so (vv.1-21a), Paul finally and reluctantly boasts in his identity. In stark contrast to his opponents, however, Paul boasts at great length in his weakness as the appropriate way to glorify God's grace and power in one's life (v.30).

¹⁶ I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool; but if you do, then accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. ¹⁷ What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool; ¹⁸ since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast.

2 Corinthians 11:16-18

In his arrogance the fool boasts in himself, not in the Lord: <<'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends>> (2 Corinthians 10:17-18), for which he is condemned, yet Paul does not match the profile of a fool: <<Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good>> (Psalm 14:1), <<Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they commit abominable acts; there is no one who does good . God looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God>> (Psalm 53:1-2), and: <<The foolish woman is loud; she is ignorant and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the high places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, 'You who are simple, turn in here!' And to those without sense she says, 'Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' But they do not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol>> (Proverbs 9:13-18).

Almost as a fool, Paul is about to boast a little in his own identity to make his point in vv.21b-23. Paul recognises that he does so not with the Lord's authority, literally not 'according to the Lord', Greek *kata kyrion*, i.e. not following out a direct command from the Lord, refer to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 7:12-13. But as a result of the severe situation in Corinth in which many boast according to the flesh, Greek *kata sarka*, i.e. according to a life lived devoid of the Spirit. But Paul's boasting is in what the Lord has done through him which will be discussed in comments on Paul's claims made in 11:21b-12:21.

¹⁹ For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! ²⁰ For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. ²¹ To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

2 Corinthians 11:19-21a

For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! The biting sarcasm of this remark by Paul is unmistakable. Having begged their indulgence, he now points out that bearing with his senseless boasting should pose no great problem for them, since they are used to putting up with fools, even fully accepting of them. Paul minces no words when it comes to his opponents in Corinth. He also wants to make it clear that the Corinthians are in the wrong for accepting them.

The Corinthians have been duped by the apostolic pretenders. Yet they think themselves so wise! The irony of the situation does not escape Paul – nor does the danger. The Corinthians should have seen through these apostolic pretenders, but they chose not to. Moreover, they did not merely turn a blind eye to what they were about but received them with pleasure.

For you put up with it. Five terms sum up how the intruders were taking advantage of the congregation. Is Paul being too hard on the Corinthians? This verse suggests that he is not; for although the Corinthians thought themselves so wise in their dealings with the visiting missionaries, they actually allowed themselves to be walked all over.

A slap in the face is a reference to the Jewish opponents insulting the Gentile Corinthians, probably not by literally striking them as was the case with Jesus: <<*When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?'*>> (John 18:22), and with Paul: <<*Then the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near him to strike him on the mouth*>> (Acts 23:2). All five actions listed in v.20 are signs of an arrogant, domineering attitude on the part of these false leaders. In another statement of irony or sarcasm, Paul says that to his shame he was too weak to act like his opponents.

^{21b} But whatever anyone 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 descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman – I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death.

2 Corinthians 11:21b-23

Hebrews is a reference to Jewish ethnicity, whereas Israelites is a reference to being God's chosen people under the old covenant.

Paul refers to both physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham; the latter would indicate those who are part of the new covenant people of God: <<*Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham*>> (Luke 3:8), <<*It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.'*>> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are

counted as descendants>> (Romans 9:6-8), <<*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you'*>> (Galatians 3:8).

Measured by his zeal for his heritage, Paul even claims to be a better servant of Christ than his opponents: <<*I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors*>> (Galatians 1:14), and: <<*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless*>> (Philippians 3:4b-6).

Because he is reluctant to speak of himself in this way, Paul downplays his qualifications, saying that he is speaking as a fool and talking like a madman. In spite of his reluctance, however, Paul goes on to give a summary of what he has experienced, not for his own praise but that: <<*Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up*>> (2 Corinthians 12:19c), for elsewhere Paul says: <<*I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings*>> (1 Corinthians 9:23), and: <<*Do everything for the glory of God*>> (1 Corinthians 10:31c).

The final part of v.23 gives an insight into parts of Paul's ministry service that are not fully recorded in Acts. Far greater labours reflects the nature of his ministry for Paul travelled thousands of miles, mostly on foot along dangerous routes, to proclaim the Gospel, taking every opportunity to speak to the people. In addition, he worked as a tentmaker to pay for his living and travelling expenses.

Far more imprisonments. The only imprisonment directly referred to in Acts before Paul wrote this letter was in Philippi, recorded in Acts 16:16-40. It was here that he received one of countless floggings. Refer to comments on vv.25-27.

²⁴ Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

2 Corinthians 11:24

Forty lashes minus one. The Jewish punishment of 39 lashes was given by the synagogue leaders for false teaching, blasphemy, and serious lawbreaking, all of which could have been applied to Paul's preaching of the Gospel, especially to Gentiles according to Jewish thinking, such as: <<*Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles*>> (Acts 13:46), and: <<*After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you'*>> (Acts 17:1-3). It was the most severe beating allowed by Scripture: <<*Suppose two persons have a dispute and enter into litigation, and the judges decide between them, declaring one to be in the right and the other to be in the wrong. If the one in the wrong deserves to be flogged, the judge shall make that person lie down and be beaten in his presence with the*>> (Deuteronomy 25:1-2).

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number of lashes proportionate to the offence. Forty lashes may be given but not more; if more lashes than these are given, your neighbour will be degraded in your sight>> (Deuteronomy 25:1-3).

The reason why it became 39 and not 40 lashes was that such punishment was given in groups of three lashes. Two were administered to the naked back followed by one across the chest.

²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.

2 Corinthians 11:25-27

Beaten with rods. This was the Gentile punishment for disturbing the peace as seen in Philippi: <<*The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely*>> (Acts 16:22-23), and: <<*You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:2).

Once, in Lystra, Paul was stoned and left for dead, as recorded in Acts 14:5-19, the most common form of execution in the Bible: <<*One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death*>> (Leviticus 24:16).

Three times I was shipwrecked. Of course, this would not include the shipwreck described in Acts Chapter 27, which occurred several years after Paul wrote this letter. Paul's description of shipwrecks and other dangerous aspects of his journeys aligns well with other ancient travel narratives, even if Paul's experiences were especially intense. Nautical archaeologists have identified many ancient shipwrecked boats around the Mediterranean Sea and the dangers of land travel are well documented.

²⁸ And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

2 Corinthians 11:28-29

And, besides from other things summarises the other physical sufferings Paul had endured and could have listed. One was the good reputation and bright prospects he had as a Pharisee in Jerusalem.

Anxiety for all the churches is an indication of the emotional stress that Paul also felt as part of his ministry. He alluded to this during his time in Troas. Refer to 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 and the comments made there.

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Paul aligns himself with the feelings of others when they face trials and tribulations.

Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? Paul makes his feelings clear when others place obstacles in the way of believers. Jesus had made his own feelings very clear: <<*If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea*>> (Mark 9:42).

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

2 Corinthians 11:30

God triumphs amid human weakness, embodying the principle of Christ's crucifixion: <<*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong*>> (1 Corinthians 1:27), and: <<*Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards*>> (2 Corinthians 10:3).

³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he for ever!) knows that I do not lie. ³² In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas set a guard on 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 from his hands.

2 Corinthians 11:31-33

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus. Paul, as both a Pharisee and a Christian, would not call on God as a witness to the fact that I do not lie unless it were true. Everything in his being would know that to do otherwise would be blasphemous.

Paul's experience in Damascus shortly after encountering the risen Christ, as recorded in Acts 9:8-25, took place under the governor there during the reign of the Nabataean King Aretas IV (9BC-AD40). Having to flee in a basket was a striking example of Paul's 'weakness' (v.30), as a result of being called to suffer for Christ's name: <<*I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name*>> (Acts 9:16).