

# CHAPTER 11

In this chapter the apostle goes on with his discourse, in opposition to the false apostles, who were very industrious to lessen his interest and reputation among the Corinthians, and had prevailed too much by their insinuations.

**I.** He apologizes for going about to commend himself, and gives the reason for what he did (v. 1-4).

**II.** He mentions, in his own necessary vindication, his equality with the other apostles, and with the false apostles in this particular of preaching the gospel to the Corinthians freely, without wages (v. 5-15).

**III.** He makes another preface to what he was about further to say in his own justification (v. 16-21). And,

**IV.** He gives a large account of his qualifications, labours, and sufferings, in which he exceeded the false apostles (v. 22 to the end).

## 2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-4

### THE APOSTLE ASSERTS HIS CLAIMS

Here we may observe,

- 1.** The apology the apostle makes for going about to commend himself. He is loth to enter upon this subject of self-commendation: *Would to God you could bear with me a little in my folly*, v. 1. He calls this folly, because too often it is really no better. In his case it was necessary; yet, seeing others might apprehend it to be folly in him, he desires them to bear with it. Note, As much against the grain as it is with a proud man to acknowledge his infirmities, so much is it against the grain with a humble man to speak in his own praise. It is no pleasure to a good man to speak well of himself, yet in some cases it is lawful, namely, when it is for the advantage of others, or for our own necessary vindication; as thus it was here. For,
- 2.** We have the reasons for what the apostle did.

(1.) To preserve the Corinthians from being corrupted by the insinuations of the false apostles, v. 2, 3. He tells them *he was jealous over them with godly jealousy*; he was afraid lest their faith should be weakened by hearkening to such suggestions as tended to lessen their regard to his ministry, by which they were brought to the Christian faith. He had *espoused them to one husband*, that is, converted them to Christianity (and the conversion of a soul is its marriage to the Lord Jesus); and he was desirous to *present them as a chaste virgin* pure, and spotless, and faithful, not having *their minds corrupted* with false doctrines by false teachers, as *Eve was beguiled by the subtlety of the serpent*. This godly jealousy in the apostle was a mixture of love and fear; and faithful ministers cannot but be afraid and concerned for their people, lest they should lose that which they have received, and turn from what they have embraced, especially when *deceivers have gone abroad*, or have *crept in among them*.

(2.) To vindicate himself against the false apostles, forasmuch as they could not pretend they had another Jesus, or another Spirit, or another gospel, to preach to them, v. 4. If this had been the case, there would have been some colour of reason to bear with them, or to hearken to them. But seeing there is but one Jesus, one Spirit, and one gospel, that is, or at least that ought to be, preached to them and received by them, what reason could there be why the Corinthians should be prejudiced against him, who first converted them to the faith, by the artifices of any adversary? It was a just occasion of jealousy that such persons designed to preach another Jesus, another Spirit, and another gospel.

## ~~4115~~ 2 CORINTHIANS 11:515

### THE APOSTLE ASSERTS HIS CLAIMS

After the foregoing preface to what he was about to say, the apostle in these verses mentions,

**I.** His equality with the other apostles that *he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles*, v. 5. This he expresses very modestly: *I suppose so*. He might have spoken very positively. The apostleship, as an office, was equal in all the apostles; but the apostles, like other Christians, differed one from another. These *stars differed one from another in glory*, and Paul was indeed of the first magnitude; yet he speaks modestly of

himself, and humbly owns his personal infirmity, that he was *rude in speech*, had not such a graceful delivery as some others might have. Some think that he was a man of very low stature, and that his voice was proportionably small; others think that he may have had some impediment in his speech, perhaps a stammering tongue. However, he was not *rude in knowledge*; he was not unacquainted with the best rules of oratory and the art of persuasion, much less was he ignorant of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, as had been *thoroughly manifested among them*.

**II.** His equality with the false apostles in this particular the preaching of the gospel unto them freely, without wages. This the apostle largely insists on, and shows that, as they could not but own him to be a minister of Christ, so they ought to acknowledge he had been a good friend to them. For,

**1.** He had preached the gospel to them freely, v. 710. He had proved at large, in his former epistle to them, the lawfulness of ministers' receiving maintenance from the people, and the duty of the people to give them an honourable maintenance; and here he says he himself had *taken wages of other churches* (v. 8), so that he had a right to have asked and received from them: yet he waived his right, and chose rather to abase himself, by working with his hands in the trade of tent-making to maintain himself, than be burdensome to them, that they might *be exalted*, or encouraged to receive the gospel, which they had so cheaply; yea, he chose rather to be supplied from Macedonia than to be chargeable unto them.

**2.** He informs them of the reason of this his conduct among them. It was not because *he did not love them* (v. 11), or was unwilling to receive tokens of their love (for love and friendship are manifested by mutual giving and receiving), but it was to avoid offence, that *he might cut off occasion from those that desired occasion*. He would not give occasion for any to accuse him of worldly designs in preaching the gospel, or that he intended to make a trade of it, to enrich himself; and that others who opposed him at Corinth might not in this respect gain an advantage against him: that wherein *they gloried*, as to this matter, *they might be found even as he*, v. 12. It is not improbable to suppose that the chief of the false teachers at Corinth, or some among them, were rich, and taught (or deceived) the people freely, and might accuse the apostle or his fellow-labourers as mercenary men, who received hire or wages, and therefore the

apostle kept to his resolution not to be chargeable to any of the Corinthians.

**III.** The false apostles are charged *as deceitful workers* (v. 13), and that upon this account, because they would *transform themselves* into the likeness of the apostles of Christ, and, though they were the ministers of Satan, would seem to be the *ministers of righteousness*. They would be as industrious and as generous in promoting error as the apostles were in preaching truth; they would endeavour as much to undermine the kingdom of Christ as the apostles did to establish it. There were counterfeit prophets under the Old Testament, who wore the garb and learned the language of the prophets of the Lord. So there were counterfeit apostles under the New Testament, who seemed in many respects like the true apostles of Christ. And no marvel (says the apostle); hypocrisy is a thing not to be much wondered at in this world, especially when we consider the great influence Satan has upon the minds of many, who *rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience*. As he can turn himself into any shape, and put on almost any form, and look sometimes *like an angel of light*, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness, so he will teach his ministers and instruments to do the same. But it follows, *Their end is according to their works* (v. 15); the end will discover them to be deceitful workers, and their work will end in ruin and destruction.

## 2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-21

### THE APOSTLE ASSERTS HIS CLAIMS

Here we have a further excuse that the apostle makes for what he was about to say in his own vindication.

**1.** He would not have them think he was guilty of folly, in saying what he said to vindicate himself: *Let no man think me a fool*, v. 16. Ordinarily, indeed, it is unbecoming a wise man to be much and often speaking in his own praise. Boasting of ourselves is usually not only a sign of a proud mind, but a mark of folly also. However, says the apostle, yet *as a fool receive me*; that is, if you count it folly in me to *boast a little*, yet give due regard to what I shall say.

2. He mentions a caution, to prevent the abuse of what he should say, telling them that what he spoke, *he did not speak after the Lord*, v. 17. He would not have them think that boasting of ourselves, or glorying in what we have, is a thing commanded by the Lord in general unto Christians, nor yet that this is always necessary in our own vindication; though it may be lawfully used, because not contrary to the Lord, when, strictly speaking, it is not after the Lord. It is the duty and practice of Christians, in obedience to the command and example of the Lord, rather to humble and abase themselves; yet prudence must direct in what circumstances it is needful to do that which we may do lawfully, even speak of what God has wrought for us, and in us, and by us too.

3. He gives a good reason why they should suffer him to boast a little; namely, because they suffered others to do so who had less reason. *Seeing many glory after the flesh* (of carnal privileges, or outward advantages and attainments), *I will glory also*, v. 18. But he would not glory in those things, though he had as much or more reason than others to do so. But he gloried in his infirmities, as he tells them afterwards. The Corinthians thought themselves wise, and might think it an instance of wisdom to bear with the weakness of others, and therefore suffered others to do what might seem folly; therefore the apostle would have them bear with him. Or these words, *You suffer fools gladly, seeing you yourselves are wise* (v. 19), may be ironical, and then the meaning is this: “Notwithstanding all your wisdom, you willingly suffer yourselves to be *brought into bondage* under the Jewish yoke, or suffer others to tyrannize over you; nay, to *devour you*, or make a prey of you, and *take of you* hire for their own advantage, and to *exalt themselves* above you, and lord it over you; nay, even to *smite you on the face*, or impose upon you to your very faces (v. 20), upbraiding you while they reproach me, as if you had been very weak in showing regard to me,” v. 21. Seeing this was the case, that the Corinthians, or some among them, could so easily bear all this from the false apostles, it was reasonable for the apostle to desire, and expect, they should bear with what might seem to them an indiscretion in him, seeing the circumstances of the case were such as made it needful that *whereinsoever any were bold* he should be *bold also*, v. 21.

## 2 CORINTHIANS 11:22-33

### THE APOSTLE RECOUNTS HIS SUFFERINGS

Here the apostle gives a large account of his own qualifications, labours, and sufferings (not out of pride or vain-glory, but to the honour of God, who had enabled him to do and suffer so much for the cause of Christ), and wherein he excelled the false apostles, who would lessen his character and usefulness among the Corinthians. Observe,

**I.** He mentions the privileges of his birth (v. 22), which were equal to any they could pretend to. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews; of a family among the Jews that never intermarried with the Gentiles. He was also an Israelite, and could boast of his being descended from the beloved Jacob as well as they, and was also of the seed of Abraham, and not of the proselytes. It should seem from this that the false apostles were of the Jewish race, who gave disturbance to the Gentile converts.

**II.** He makes mention also of his apostleship, that he was more than an ordinary minister of Christ, v. 23. God had counted him faithful, and had put him into the ministry. He had been a useful minister of Christ unto them; they had found full proofs of his ministry: *Are they ministers of Christ? I am more so.*

**III.** He chiefly insists upon this, that he had been an extraordinary sufferer for Christ; and this was what he gloried in, or rather he gloried in the grace of God that had enabled him to be more *abundant in labours*, and to endure very great sufferings, such as *stripes above measure*, *frequent imprisonments*, and *often the dangers of death*, v. 23. Note, When the apostle would prove himself an extraordinary minister, he proves that he had been an extraordinary sufferer. Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles, and for that reason was hated of the Jews. They did all they could against him; and among the Gentiles also he met with hard usage. Bonds and imprisonments were familiar to him; never was the most notorious malefactor more frequently in the hands of public justice than Paul was for righteousness' sake. The jail and the whipping-post, and all other hard usages of those who are accounted the worst of men, were what he was accustomed to. As to the Jews, whenever he fell into their hands, they never spared him. *Five times* he fell under their lash, and received *forty*

*stripes save one*, v. 24. Forty stripes was the utmost their law allowed (<sup>462B</sup>Deuteronomy 25:3), but it was usual with them, that they might not exceed, to abate one at least of that number. And to have the abatement of one only was all the favour that ever Paul received from them. The Gentiles were not tied up to that moderation, and among them *he was thrice beaten with rods*, of which we may suppose once was at Philippi, <sup>462C</sup>Acts 16:22. *Once he was stoned* in a popular tumult, and was taken up for dead, <sup>462D</sup>Acts 14:19. He says that *thrice he suffered shipwreck*; and we may believe him, though the sacred history gives a relation but of one. *A night and a day he had been in the deep* (v. 25), in some deep dungeon or other, shut up as a prisoner. Thus he was all his days a constant confessor; perhaps scarcely a year of his life, after his conversion, passed without suffering some hardship or other for his religion; yet this was not all, for, wherever he went, he went in perils; he was exposed to perils of all sorts. If he journeyed by land, or voyaged by sea, he was in perils of robbers, or enemies of some sort; the Jews, his own countrymen, sought to kill him, or do him a mischief; the heathen, to whom he was sent, were not more kind to him, for among them he was in peril. If he was in the city, or in the wilderness, still he was in peril. He was in peril not only among avowed enemies, but among those also who called themselves brethren, but were false brethren, v. 26. Besides all this, he had great weariness and painfulness in his ministerial labours, and these are things that will come into account shortly, and people will be reckoned with for all the care and pains of their ministers concerning them. Paul was a stranger to wealth and plenty, power and pleasure, preferment and ease; he was in *watchings often*, and exposed to *hunger and thirst*; in *fastings often*, it may be out of necessity; and endured *cold and nakedness*, v. 27. Thus was he, who was one of the greatest blessings of the age, used as if he had been the burden of the earth, and the plague of his generation. And yet this is not all; for, as an apostle, the *care of all the churches* lay on him, v. 28. He mentions this last, as if this lay the heaviest upon him, and as if he could better bear all the persecutions of his enemies than the scandals that were to be found in the churches he had the oversight of. *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?* v. 29. There was not a weak Christian with whom he did not sympathize, nor any one scandalized, but he was affected therewith. See what little reason we have to be in love with the pomp and plenty of this world, when this blessed apostle, one of the best of men that ever lived, excepting Jesus Christ, felt so much hardship in it. Nor was he ashamed of all this, but, on the contrary, it was what he

accounted his honour; and therefore, much against the grain as it was with him to glory, yet, says he, *if I must needs glory*, if my adversaries will oblige me to it in my own necessary vindication, *I will glory in these my infirmities*, v. 30. Note, Sufferings for righteousness' sake will, the most of any thing, redound to our honour.

In the last two verses, he mentions one particular part of his sufferings out of its place, as if he had forgotten it before, or because the deliverance God wrought for him was most remarkable; namely, the danger he was in at Damascus, soon after he was converted, and not settled in Christianity, at least in the ministry and apostleship. This is recorded, ~~402~~ Acts 9:24, 25. This was his first great danger and difficulty, and the rest of his life was a piece with this. And it is observable that, lest it should be thought he spoke more than was true, the apostle confirms this narrative with a solemn oath, or appeal to the omniscience of God, v. 31. It is a great comfort to a good man that *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who is an omniscient God, knows the truth of all he says, and knows all he does and all he suffers for his sake.