

2 Corinthians 11:1- *“Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.”*

Paul is about to share things that may sound foolish or unusual to his readers. This was not a new concern for Paul, as many of his letters contained warnings against being led away by false doctrine and teachings that were contrary to Christ (Epistle to the Colossians 2:8).

The word “folly” in Greek is *aphrosynē* and means foolishness, lack of understanding, or acting in a way that appears unreasonable. Paul is not saying that he is actually foolish; rather, he is acknowledging that what he is about to say—defending his apostleship and speaking about his sufferings and ministry accomplishments—could appear foolish by human standards.

The next verse reveals why Paul is willing to speak this way. His purpose was not self-promotion but protecting the Corinthians from deception and preserving their devotion to Christ. What may appear foolish from a natural perspective was actually motivated by love and a desire to keep them faithful to the truth of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:2- *“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”*

Paul is using the picture of a bride remaining faithful to her spouse. This same imagery is seen throughout Scripture, including the book of Book of Hosea, where God’s relationship with His people is pictured as a covenant relationship requiring faithfulness.

Paul’s concern was that the Corinthians would remain devoted to the truth of Christ and not be drawn away by another message. There is only one gospel and one truth, so we must examine whether the message we believe and preach reflects what Jesus Himself revealed.

Does the gospel you believe and preach reflect the same one Jesus preached? If you believe God wants you sick, there is a fallacy in your doctrine. If you believe that poverty is your portion than you are contrary to what Jesus ministered in Luke 4:18-19.

Paul stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16), and throughout this chapter he is defending the message he preached—not because he wanted recognition, but because he wanted the Corinthians to remain faithful to Christ and the truth they had received.

2 Corinthians 11:3- *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”*

This verse says a mouthful. Paul is drawing the believer back to the fall in Eden with Adam and Eve and reveals that it was through deception that the enemy enticed Eve. The enemy has no new tricks up his sleeve (1 John 2:16): the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

The whole goal of the enemy is to get you to believe a lie and then watch you destroy yourself. Many of you reading this at one point perceived that we had to earn right standing with God instead of receiving it by grace. This is a major deception in the body of Christ.

Notice the target for Satan's attacks: it is the soul (Psalm 143:3). The war that takes place is right between our ears. The enemy's strategy is to influence the way we think because our thoughts eventually shape our beliefs, and our beliefs shape our actions.

The enemy once told Napoleon Hill, "I control people because they don't think for themselves, so I do the thinking for them."

2 Corinthians 11:4- *"For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!"*

Those in Corinth received the Spirit of Christ when they were born again, and Paul is echoing the same truth he preached to the Galatians. He asked them a question: "Did you begin in the Spirit and now move on to something else?"

This verse confirms that they had received Jesus and were born again, but it also reveals that it is possible to be led astray from the truth. We should be aggressive with the doctrine that we hear and understand that if we are casual and allow ourselves to believe anything outside of what Jesus preached, it can bring us into captivity.

2 Corinthians 11:5- "For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles."

Who is Paul speaking about here? Peter, James, and John walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry, but Paul received direct revelation from the resurrected Jesus Himself (Galatians 1:12). He also states in Galatians that those who seemed to be something made no difference to him, because God does not show favoritism (Galatians 2:6).

Do you feel inferior when others walk into the room? Do you feel insufficient because of someone else's position, reputation, or experience?

I remember in Bible college, the majority of the students would say that if they had to give a message in front of the founder and president of the school, they would crumble and collapse. I never understood this. This person was not different from us—he was loving and a child of God, just like we were.

I have zero desire to be intimidated by someone else. I can respect and honor people, but I will not see myself as inferior while exalting them as superior. A mentor of mine once said, "The only time you should be nervous speaking in front of someone is when you are speaking on something you have no business talking about."

2 Corinthians 11:6- *"Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things."*

Paul did not attend a teaching lab in ministry school, nor did he take a mastermind course on how to deliver the Word of God. He preached, and the Father backed his words with power.

The word “untrained” in Greek is *idiōtēs*, which means an unskilled, untrained, or common person. It does not mean Paul lacked knowledge or understanding; rather, it referred to his lack of formal training in public speaking or the traditional methods of rhetoric that were valued in that culture.

Paul was not relying on natural ability or impressive speech. His confidence came from the revelation he had received from Christ and the power of God working through him (1 Corinthians 2:4). He may not have been trained according to the standards of men, but he was fully equipped by God (2 Corinthians 9:8).

2 Corinthians 11:7- *“Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?”*

One of Paul’s greatest themes is humility. This was preached in Philippians chapter 2, using Jesus as our greatest example. The only way up in the Kingdom is down. Even heaven demands death, and it is important to note that in leadership, this is Jesus’ method of achieving greatness.

Matthew 20:28 says that Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus was not concerned with how many people served Him, but how many people He could serve.

If you want to be great and have influence, it comes through serving your gifts to the world. That is when you create value, and when you begin to create value, you will be sought after.

This verse also states that the Gospel is free. Salvation is free, but the price one pays to get it out is costly (2 Timothy 3:12). If you are not being persecuted, the question is: are you truly preaching the Gospel?

2 Corinthians 11:8- *“I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.”*

Paul did not literally rob any churches. He is, in a sense, being sarcastic and stating that he did not receive an offering from those in Corinth, but he did receive offerings from other churches.

2 Corinthians 11:9- *“And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.”*

This was wisdom on Paul’s part not to receive an offering from those in Corinth. With the dysfunction and strife going on, along with the accusations against his apostleship, it would not have been wise for him to receive from them.

It is one thing for something to be right, but it is another thing to know if and when you should do it. This is where the leading of the Holy Spirit comes in and why it is essential.

2 Corinthians 11:10- *“As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.”*

Paul preached the Gospel freely without charge, and no one could say that he ministered for profit. He worked with his own hands, and those in Macedonia also supported him.

2 Corinthians 11:11- *Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!”*

Paul refusing to receive an offering from those in Corinth was not rebellion it was wisdom. His desire was to eliminate any false accusations that could draw anyone back to Paul delivering truth for financial gain.

His motive of this was love and this is the narrative Paul gives throughout his letters. It was his love for the churches and that should also be anyone else’s motive in ministry. If you’re not in it for the people that ministry is not area.

2 Corinthians 11:12- *“But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.*

When Paul states what he does he will continue to do he is reiterating that he will continue to not receive any financial support from those in Corinth and he gives the reason. It is to dissolve any area that false apostles could come in and accuse Paul’s motives.

2 Corinthians 11:13 - *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.”*

Paul now begins to expose who these people are. They are described as people who disguise themselves as workers sent by God, but in reality they are hypocrites. This is what makes deception so dangerous—many times we don't even realize we are being deceived.

The Catholic Church is a prime example of this. Worshiping saints and praying to priests are not scriptural. There is only one Mediator between God and man, and it is not the one in the confessional with his collar turned around (1 Timothy 2:5).

Likewise, the idea that forgiveness or repentance is administered through priests is a false teaching. True repentance is placing your faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work, not in your own works (Romans 5:17).

2 Corinthians 11:14- *“And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”*

The false apostles Paul is speaking about are being influenced by the devil. Satan's primary weapon is deception. If there is any area of your life where you are in bondage, it is because you have believed a lie instead of God's truth. Throughout Scripture, darkness often represents ignorance and spiritual blindness, while light reveals truth and brings understanding.

The Greek word translated "transforms" is *metaschēmatizō* which means "to disguise," "to masquerade," or "to change one's outward appearance." Paul is emphasizing that Satan does not become an angel of light in nature; rather, he disguises himself as one. In the same way, false teachers do not openly present themselves as servants of evil. They masquerade as ministers of Christ, using religious language and appearing righteous while leading people away from the truth of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 11:15- *"Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."*

This is not the first time Paul openly rebukes those who use the gospel for selfish motives and lead people away from Christ. In Philippians, he warns of people like this, saying, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things" (Philippians 3:18–19.).

Like the false apostles in Corinth, these individuals were driven by self-interest rather than a desire to glorify Christ. Their focus was on personal gain, prestige, and worldly ambition instead of proclaiming the true gospel. Paul identifies them as enemies of the cross because their lives and teachings undermined the message of salvation by grace through faith. Their ultimate end, unless they repent, is destruction because they have rejected the truth of the gospel while deceiving others.

2 Corinthians 11:16- *"I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little."*

Paul is speaking with irony here. His opponents had boasted about their credentials and achievements, and the Corinthians had tolerated their foolish boasting. So Paul sarcastically asks them to regard him as a fool for a moment so that he, too, can "boast." His purpose is not to exalt himself but to expose the emptiness of the false apostles' claims and to defend the authenticity of his ministry given to him by God.

2 Corinthians 11:17- *"What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting."*

Paul is not saying that his words are uninspired or that he is speaking apart from God's authority. Rather, he is acknowledging that boasting is contrary to his normal character and the example of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:18- *"Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast."*

Boasting in anything outside of Christ is boasting according to the flesh. The flesh always seeks to exalt self rather than glorify Christ. Even in times of sickness and disease, a person can become consumed with self, allowing everything to revolve around them and the sickness. The flesh is a great servant but makes a terrible master.

Paul uses irony and humor here to expose the foolishness of boasting in the flesh. He is not encouraging self-promotion but revealing how absurd it is. The Corinthians had entertained the empty boasting of the false apostles, so Paul temporarily adopts their style of reasoning to expose its folly and redirect their attention back to what truly matters—Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:19- *"For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!"*

If the Corinthians were truly so wise, why were they entertaining the opinions of fools? Once again, Paul uses irony to expose the spiritual blinders they had put on. They had begun to question Paul's apostleship while embracing the claims of the very false apostles who were deceiving them.

This is exactly how deception works. When people lose sight of the truth, they can begin to reject those who faithfully proclaim the gospel while accepting those who distort it. Paul had already warned believers that Satan seeks to gain an advantage through deception. As he wrote, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). The Corinthians had become vulnerable because they were giving ear to false teachers instead of remaining grounded in the truth of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:20- *"For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face."*

Paul's description in this verse reveals the effects of false doctrine on those who embrace it. False teachers bring people into bondage, exploit them for their own gain, exalt themselves, and abuse those who follow them. Instead of leading people into the freedom that is found in Christ, they place them under burdens that God never intended them to bear.

Deception begins with words. False teaching is spread through persuasive speech and clever arguments that sound convincing but are contrary to the truth of the gospel. Paul warned the Colossians, "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (Colossians 2:4). This is why believers must measure every teaching against Scripture. Truth produces freedom in Christ, while deception leads to bondage.

2 Corinthians 11:21- *To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also."*

The righteous are as bold as a lion (proverbs 28:1). Paul did not shrink back from his assignment.

2 Corinthians 11:22- *"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I."*

The false teachers Paul is confronting were using their credentials and supposed religious superiority to validate their claims and exalt themselves. They relied on their heritage, status, and outward qualifications to gain influence over others.

Paul, however, could have placed confidence in the flesh more than they could. In Philippians 3, he lists his own impressive credentials—his lineage, his Jewish heritage, his natural descent, and his training under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Yet he refused to boast in any of these things. Instead, he counted them all as loss, even as rubbish (or dung), compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7–8).

"Are they Hebrews? So am I." Paul was a Hebrew by birth and culture. He could speak the Hebrew (or Aramaic) language and had been raised according to Jewish customs. "Are they Israelites? So am I." Paul belonged to the nation of Israel, God's covenant people. He was not an outsider but a genuine Israelite. "Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I." Paul was a physical descendant of Abraham through the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5). He possessed the same ancestral lineage that his opponents claimed.

Paul's point is clear: human credentials, religious achievements, and family heritage do not make a person righteous before God. The only confidence worth having is in Jesus Christ and His finished work.

2 Corinthians 11:23- *"Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often."*

This may be my favorite section in the entire Bible because Paul opens up about the hardships he endured for the sake of Christ. Instead of boasting in his accomplishments, he boasts in his sufferings. His trials became the evidence of his faithfulness to the gospel rather than his weakness.

I often refer to this passage when discussing the claim that Paul lived with a physical sickness or disease. Here, Paul provides one of the most detailed accounts of the afflictions he endured throughout his ministry. He lists imprisonments, beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, and countless dangers, yet he never mentions living with a chronic sickness or disease. If physical illness had been a defining feature of his ministry, this would seem to have been a natural place to include it among his many sufferings.

Paul's purpose, however, is to show that the marks of a true servant of Christ are not worldly success or outward credentials but faithful endurance through suffering for the gospel.

Why did Paul endure all of this? Because he had a purpose. He knew he had been called by Christ, and that purpose gave him the strength to persevere through every trial.

Many people lack purpose, and as a result, they crumble under pressure. Purpose produces passion, and passion becomes the driving force behind your vision. When you know why God has called you, you can endure difficulties that would otherwise cause you to quit.

Purpose is not merely something you are willing to live for—it is something you are willing to die for. Paul understood that his life belonged to Christ. That is why no amount of persecution, suffering, or hardship could deter him from fulfilling the mission God had entrusted to him.

2 Corinthians 11:24- *"From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one."*

Paul is referring to the thirty-nine lashes he received from the Jews. Under the Law of Moses, the maximum punishment was forty lashes, but Jewish tradition limited the number to thirty-nine to avoid accidentally exceeding the limit prescribed in the Law (Deuteronomy 25:1–3). This punishment was administered with a leather whip and was intended to bring severe pain and public humiliation.

Remarkably, Paul endured this punishment five separate times.

2 Corinthians 11:25- *"Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;"*

Being beaten with rods was a completely different form of punishment than receiving the 39 lashes. This was a Roman penalty, typically inflicted by Roman magistrates. What makes Paul's statement especially interesting is that he was a Roman citizen, a status that should have protected him from being beaten without a lawful trial.

Why, then, was Paul beaten with rods? One possibility is that the authorities simply did not know he was a Roman citizen. Another is that the officials abused their authority or ignored Roman law, especially amid the unrest that often surrounded Paul's ministry.

Paul later appealed to his rights as a Roman citizen in Acts 22:25, asking, *"Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"* The question immediately halted the proceedings because the soldiers recognized they were about to violate Roman law.

2 Corinthians 11:26 - *"In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;"*

The Greek word translated perils is *kindynos*, meaning dangers. Paul was in danger from waters, thieves, his very own people, those he was sent to minister to (Ephesians 3:8), in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false believers. This raises an important question: How did Paul continue in his calling despite all of this?

I believe God reveals our purpose, but He often will conceal every detail of the process and how that purpose will unfold. He gives enough light for us to take the next step, but not always enough to see the entire journey. If we knew every hardship beforehand, many of us might hesitate to obey and abandon the assignment.

I have often wondered: If Paul had known every beating, every imprisonment, every shipwreck, every betrayal, and every sleepless night that awaited him, would he have accepted such a weighty assignment—to preach the gospel and proclaim the covenant of grace?

Scripture indicates that Paul was given a glimpse of what lay ahead. When the Lord called him, He said, "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16).

Yet there is no indication that God revealed every detail of those sufferings. Paul knew suffering was part of his calling, but he discovered much of that journey one step at a time.

This reminds me of Joseph. As a young man, God revealed through dreams that Joseph would one day be elevated to a position of authority. The destination was revealed, but the process was not.

Over the next thirteen years, Joseph was hated by his brothers, stripped of his robe, thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, imprisoned, and forgotten by the very man he helped. None of those painful chapters appeared in the dreams God gave him.

Had God revealed every detail of Joseph's journey at the beginning, I sometimes wonder if Joseph would have responded, "I'm good, Lord. Why don't You choose Reuben or Benjamin instead?"

2 Corinthians 11:27 - *"In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."*

Paul's calling was greater than his comfort.

Anyone you study who accomplished something great had a purpose that led to a conviction, and that conviction was fueled by passion. It is that passion that gives a person the endurance to keep going when life becomes difficult.

Your purpose is your reason for existence. It goes far beyond a casual interest or hobby. Purpose gives you a reason to persevere when others would quit.

Martin Luther King Jr. had a purpose to end segregation. That purpose produced a conviction that moved him to action despite constant threats against his life.

Corrie ten Boom stood firm in her faith during the Nazi persecution and endured the horrors of the concentration camps. Even after witnessing her sister's suffering and death, she chose to forgive one of the very guards who had abused them.

Nelson Mandela had a vision to end apartheid. After spending 27 years in prison, he emerged still committed to that vision rather than seeking revenge. All of these people lived for something they were willing to die for. What are you willing to die for? If you aren't sure, then it's possible you haven't yet discovered your purpose.

2 Corinthians 11:28- *"Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."*

Here is where Paul expresses his heart and reason for writing this letter. At times he was harsh but it was from a motive of love.

2 Corinthians 11:29- *"Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?"*

Paul's motive was love and that did not have an ingredient for them to stumble. His letter was not to harm those in Corinth it was to prompt them to grow.

2 Corinthians 11:30- *"If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity."*

This is one of the verses many people use to argue that Paul suffered from a physical sickness because of the word "infirmity." However, the Greek word *astheneia* has a broader meaning. While it can refer to sickness or illness, it also means weakness, frailty, or lack of strength, and the context determines which meaning is intended.

In this passage, Paul is not saying that he is boasting about being sick. Rather, he is summing up everything he has described in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29—the imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, dangers, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold, and the daily burden of caring for the churches. These are the "weaknesses" in which he boasts because they demonstrate his dependence upon God's strength rather than his own.

After enduring everything he listed in verses 26–29, I am sure Paul was physically and emotionally exhausted. He had been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, deprived of food and sleep, and carried the constant burden of ministry. Anyone would have been weak after such experiences.

Paul's point is not that sickness validated his apostleship. His point is that the hardships and weaknesses he endured for the sake of Christ revealed the genuineness of his ministry. While the false apostles boasted in their accomplishments, status, and outward credentials, Paul boasted in the very things that exposed his human weakness, because it was through those weaknesses that the power and faithfulness of God were displayed (2 Corinthians 9:8).

2 Corinthians 11:31- *"The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying."*

God cannot lie and neither was Paul (Titus 1:2).

2 Corinthians 11:32- *"In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me;"*

The word garrison comes from the Greek word *phroureō*, which means to guard, keep watch over, protect, or maintain a watch. In this context, it describes a military guard or watch that was stationed throughout the city to prevent Paul's escape. The governor had the city under careful surveillance because he was determined to arrest him.

There is an interesting contrast here. In Acts 9, Paul was traveling to Damascus with authority to arrest Christians. He was convinced he was serving God by imprisoning those who followed Jesus. However, on the road to Damascus, everything changed. Instead of arresting Christians,

Paul himself was arrested by the Holy Spirit. His encounter with the risen Christ completely transformed his life, mission, and purpose.

This is a powerful reminder of God's transforming grace. God did not simply change Paul's destination—He changed his heart. The greatest testimony of God's power is a transformed life. The man who once tried to silence the gospel would become one of its greatest proclaimers, proving that no one is beyond the reach of God's saving grace. Paul went from persecutor to preacher (Galatians 1:13).

2 Corinthians 11:33- *"But I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands."*

Paul is recounting an earlier event from Acts 9:23–25. Again, this is referring to all Paul endured for the sake of the gospel and his calling.