

ENGAGE

- I will be a fool for Jesus to get your attention that the choices you are making are the foolish lies of the devil. That is the sum of this chapter.
- Paul loves them and is jealous for them. They are being swayed by false teaching and losing their way.
- Paul had given money to the church. He had suffered for the church and he had every right to speak truth into their lives.
- Have we earned the right to speak into someone's life?
- What investment into someone gives us the credibility to speak truth into falsehood?

EXAMINE

A. Why Paul defends his credentials.

1. (1) Introduction: Please bear with me! Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

a. **Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly:** Paul does not call the defense of his apostleship **folly** because it is stupid or nonsense. He calls it **folly** because he does it reluctantly, knowing his time and effort could be spent on far better things. He calls it **folly** because he knows that the things he believed to be honorable about his apostleship would be regarded as foolish by some of the Corinthian Christians.

b. **And indeed you do bear with me:** One might ask, “Paul, if you think this is a **little folly**, why bother with it at all?” Yet it is worth it, for the reasons Paul will explain in the following passage.

2. (2-4) Why Paul's apostolic credentials are important.

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 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. 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!

a. **For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy:** It is important that the Corinthian Christians understand and trust Paul's apostolic credentials because Paul is **jealous** with a **godly jealousy** for their hearts. Paul's **godly jealousy** is a good thing, and he will be offended if the Corinthians are seduced by a false understanding of what being an apostle is all about.

i. Human jealousy is a vice but the Lord said, *I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.* ([Exodus 20:5](#)) “God's jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because He is selfish and wants us all for Himself, but because He knows that upon that loyalty to Him depends our very moral life... God is not jealous *of* us: He is jealous *for* us.” (Redpath in *Law and Liberty*) Sharing God's jealousy for His people is a virtue.

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ii. “God’s jealousy, therefore, is a concern for the holiness, integrity, purity of ethics, and Christian standards for His people. Because of this, He will refuse to brook a rival in our affections for Him, not because of a selfish greed which wishes us all for His own possession, but simply because He knows that His great purpose for us of purity and holiness of life depends on our personal surrender and submission to His purpose.” (Redpath)

b. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ: It is important that the Corinthian Christians understand and trust Paul’s apostolic credentials because Paul is like the friend of the groom, who watches out for the bride in the period between the betrothal and the wedding.

i. Paul considers himself the friend of Jesus the bridegroom, and he will do his best to present the bride **as a chaste virgin to Christ** on the “wedding day” – when the Corinthian Christians one day stand before Jesus.

ii. In the Jewish culture of that day, the *friend of the bridegroom* (mentioned also in [John 3:29](#)) had an important job. “To procure a husband for the virgin, to guard her, and to bear testimony to her corporeal and marital endowments; and it was upon this testimony of this friend that the bridegroom chose his bride. He was the *internuncio* between her and her spouse elect; carrying all messages from her to him, and from him to her: for before marriage you women were strictly guarded at home with their parents or friends.” Also, the *friend of the bridegroom* was called upon, if necessary, “To vindicate the character of the bride.” (Clarke)

iii. Remember also that the time of betrothal wasn’t taken lightly in Paul’s culture. If someone was unfaithful during the betrothal period, it was considered adultery, and a betrothal could only be broken by divorce.

iv. Anytime we give our hearts to something other than God, we are committing “spiritual adultery” during the period of our betrothal.

c. But I fear... your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ: It is important that the Corinthian Christians understand and trust Paul’s apostolic credentials because Paul knows the subtle nature of Satan’s deceptions.

i. Bottom line, the Corinthian Christians didn’t admire Paul’s apostolic credentials because they thought in a worldly way, not having the mind of Jesus. They didn’t like Paul’s apparent weakness and unimpressive appearance. This was an important point because Paul’s apparent weakness was shared by Jesus *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.* ([Philippians 2:6-8](#)) It wasn’t only the apostolic credentials of Paul that were under attack; the very nature of Jesus was attacked.

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ii. **As the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness:** Paul understood that Satan's deception of Eve in the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 3:1-5](#)) is a good example of Satan's deceptive tactics. His lie to Eve (*You will not surely die*) was surrounded by half-truths and enticing deception. The Corinthian Christians were challenged by the deception of "triumphalism" because it was wrapped in the truth of the triumphant life we can live in Jesus Christ.

iii. Satan's lie to Eve recalls lines from Tennyson:

*"A lie that is all of a lie can be met with and fought outright;
But a lie that is partly the truth is a harder matter to fight."*

d. **For if he who comes preaches another Jesus:** It is important that the Corinthian Christians understand and trust Paul's apostolic credentials because Paul knows they are attracted to the false apostles who preach **another Jesus**.

i. The troublemakers among the Corinthian Christians who stirred up contention against Paul didn't only attack Paul; they also attacked the true Jesus by preaching **another Jesus**. Who was this "other Jesus?" Because of the way the Corinthian Christians despised Paul's image of weakness and unimpressive appearance, the "other Jesus" was probably one who knew no weakness, persecution, humiliation, suffering, or death. A "super Jesus" is **another Jesus**, not the real Jesus, and **another Jesus** cannot save.

ii. **Whom we have not preached... a different spirit... or a different gospel:** Paul warned the Galatians against receiving another Jesus. *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed* ([Galatians 1:8-9](#)).

e. **If He who comes:** An *apostle* is "one who is sent." These troublemakers were the exact opposite of apostles. One could say of them, "**He who comes.**" Of an apostle, one could say "*one who is sent*" by God. These false apostles had simply *come*; they were not really sent by God.

f. **You may well put up with it:** The problem wasn't so much that these false teachers had come among the Christians in Corinth. The problem was that the Corinthian Christians put up with them.

i. The church has the same problem today. It is not surprising that there are false teachers in the church today; the problem is that the church puts up with them and embraces them. Christians of this generation, like Christians of many generations, will have to answer to Jesus for their lack of discernment when it comes to the false teachers and leaders accepted and embraced by the church.

3. (5-9) Paul's "foolish" humility.

For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all

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things. Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you. 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*.

a. **For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles:** Paul here compares himself to some he refers to as **the most eminent apostles**. Apparently, these were apostles that the Corinthian Christians preferred over Paul.

i. Commentators warmly debate the identity of these **most eminent apostles**. Some think they were other prominent apostles such as Peter or Apollos (as mentioned in [1 Corinthians 1:12](#)). This isn't likely. Probably, Paul speaks sarcastically of the false apostles who claimed to be superior to Paul.

ii. In the original language, the idea behind the phrase **most eminent apostles** is “extra-super apostles.” Paul probably writes sarcastically in reference to those who thought of and promoted themselves as “super-duper apostles.”

iii. **I am not at all inferior:** Whoever these **most eminent apostles** are, Paul will not claim to be *less* than they. Later Paul will explain how he (in an unlikely way) is *greater* than these supposed **most eminent apostles**.

b. **Even though I am untrained in speech:** Paul, according to the standards of Greek rhetoric, was **untrained in speech**. In Paul's day, the ability to speak in a polished, sophisticated, entertaining way was popular. Others (such as **the most eminent apostles** the Corinthian Christians loved so much) were able to speak in this manner, but Paul was either unable or unwilling to preach in this way. It didn't matter to Paul because he wasn't concerned with meeting people's standards for a “polished” or “entertaining” speaker; he was concerned with faithfully preaching the gospel.

i. A story is told about a dinner party where the guests were expected to stand after the meal and recite something for the group. A famous actor was present, and he recited the twenty-third Psalm with great dramatic flair and emotion, and sat down to great applause. Then a very simple man got up and began to recite the same Psalm. He wasn't very eloquent, so at first people thought it was a little funny. But his presentation was straight from his heart, so when he finished the group sat in respectful silence. It was obvious that the simple man's presentation was more powerful than the actor's, and afterwards the actor told him: “I know the Psalm, but you know the Shepherd.”

ii. That was the difference between the preaching of Paul and the preaching of **the most eminent apostles**. Paul didn't have all the polish and panache of a great speaker, but he knew God, and thus preached the gospel with power.

c. **But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things:** Paul couldn't – or wouldn't – give the Corinthian Christians the polished and entertaining preaching they wanted, but he did give

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them *himself*. He **thoroughly manifested** himself among the Corinthian Christians **in all things**. He wasn't a polished speaker (according to the standards of his day), but he was an honest and transparent speaker.

d. **Did I commit sin in humbling myself... because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?** In the culture of that day, if a public speaker didn't take money for his speaking he was often disregarded as a poor speaker, with worthless teaching. Many people thought of someone who charged no speaking fee as strictly an amateur. But Paul didn't care about the opinion of others when it came to his heart for preaching the gospel without being accused of doing it for money.

i. **Did I commit sin?** This shows Paul at his most ironic. The Corinthian Christians who despised Paul were so worldly in their thinking they actually thought Paul might be in **sin** because he **preached the gospel of God to you free of charge!**

e. **I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you:** The word Paul used for **robbed** is strong. In classical Greek, this word was used for stripping a dead soldier of his armor.

i. Paul refers to the fact that he received support from Christians in other cities during his time in Corinth. He could say he **robbed** those other churches in the sense that by right, the Corinthian Christians should have supported him when he ministered to their spiritual needs ([1 Corinthians 9:4-11](#)). Instead, Paul **was a burden to no one** among the Corinthian Christians.

ii. **For what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied:** The **other churches** Paul "**robbed**" were in the region of **Macedonia**, including the Philippian church. Paul thanked them for their generosity in [Philippians 4:14-18](#).

4. (10-15) Paul against the false apostles.

As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! 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. For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

a. **No one shall stop me from this boasting:** As a true apostle, Paul could "boast" that he took no money and that he was more interested in the integrity of the message than in his own needs.

b. **Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!** Paul's **boasting** in his weakness and unimpressive image was an embarrassment to the Corinthian Christians. Why did he embarrass them this way? It was only because he loved them and would find a way to bring them back from their worldly thinking.

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c. **I will continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are:** Paul wanted to expose these *most eminent apostles* as frauds. If it took biting sarcasm or embarrassing the Corinthian Christians to expose them, Paul would use those tools.

d. **For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ:** Here Paul becomes even more direct. Without sarcasm, he plainly calls his detractors in Corinth (or at least the leaders among them) **false apostles** and **deceitful workers**.

i. Few modern Christians want to deal with the fact that there are still **false apostles** and **deceitful workers** among Christians. Nevertheless, they were clearly there in Paul's day, and they remain to this day.

ii. **False apostles** are those who are **transforming themselves into apostles of Christ**. In fact, no one can **transform themselves** into a true apostle of Jesus; it is only a calling from God. "They were never apostles of Christ, only they put themselves into such a shape and form, that they might have more advantage to deceive." (Poole) As Paul will explain in the following sentence, those who *transform themselves* are more like Satan than they are like God.

e. **For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness:** Even as Satan may appear as an **angel of light**, so false apostles may have a "good" appearance. Paul is showing the Corinthian Christians how foolish it is to rely on image and outward appearances.

i. It is so easy for all people, including Christians, to be taken in by image and outward appearances. Many will only recognize evil if it openly declares itself as evil. But this approach will end up embracing **Satan himself**, who **transforms himself into an angel of light**. If Satan were to appear before a human audience, they would be strongly tempted to worship him as a creature of almost divine beauty. He would be regarded as **an angel of light**.

ii. Even so, it is foolish for the Corinthian Christians – or us today – to be taken in by image and outward appearances.

iii. Hughes rightly notes that in today's church, "an individual has only to make the most preposterous claims for himself in order to gain an enthusiastic and undiscerning following."

iv. "It is generally said that Satan has *three forms* under which he tempts men: 1. The *subtle serpent*. 2. The *roaring lion*. 3. The *angel of light*. He often, as the *angel of light*, persuades men to do things under the *name of religion*, which are subversive of it. Hence all the *persecutions*, *faggots*, and *fires* of a certain Church, under pretence of keeping *heresy* out of the Church; and hence all the *horrors* and *infernalities* of the *inquisition*. In the form of heathen persecution, like a *lion* he has ravaged the heritage of the Lord. And by means of our *senses* and *passions*, as the *subtle serpent*, he is frequently deceiving us, so that often the *workings* of *corrupt nature* are mistaken for the *operations* of the *Spirit of God*." (Clarke)

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f. **According to their works:** This is the terrible condemnation reserved for these false apostles – to be judged **according to their works**.

B. Paul's credentials as a "foolish" apostle.

1. (16-21) Fools and boasting.

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. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! 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. 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.

a. **Let no one think me a fool... I also may boast a little:** It is easy to sense both Paul's sarcasm and his hesitancy to promote himself. He would rather talk about Jesus, but that message is hindered by the Corinthians' disregard of Paul's credentials as a true apostle, a true representative of Jesus.

i. Paul is not like the "real" fools who boast of their credentials. This will become evident when Paul starts stating his credentials as a true apostle.

b. **What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly:** Paul speaks **not according to the Lord** in the sense that his defense of his credentials focuses on himself. Paul didn't like to talk about himself. He was happy to write *for we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord* ([2 Corinthians 4:5](#)).

i. Paul feels forced into writing about himself: **Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.** But Paul's boasting will be nothing like the boasting of the **many who boast according to the flesh**.

c. **For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!** Again, Paul uses biting sarcasm. If the Corinthian Christians are **wise** enough to put up with so many fools, surely they can listen to Paul for a while!

d. **For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage:** Like many of the deceived today, the Corinthian Christians would put up with abuse from "super apostles," thinking that it is somehow spiritual to endure such **bondage**.

i. The **bondage** Paul speaks of may indicate that these false apostles were legalists, trying to put people under the bondage of the Law. However, it is just as likely that the **bondage** Paul refers to is the personal domination and authority the *most eminent apostles* held over others. The emphasis on image and outward appearance is often coupled with an authoritarian approach to leadership, and this probably explains the **bondage** Paul refers to.

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e. **If one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face:** The Corinthian Christians were so taken with their “super apostles” they would accept all kind of ill treatment from them. They were so impressed with the image of authority and power of the “super apostles,” they meekly submitted to this kind of treatment.

i. Would the Corinthian Christians even accept it **if one strikes you on the face**? They probably would because it wasn’t uncommon for religious authorities in that day (outside of Jesus’ true ministers) to command that those people they considered to be ungodly to actually be struck in the face ([Acts 23:2](#), [1 Timothy 3:3](#)).

ii. Sadly, many people are more comfortable with authoritarian “super apostles” than they are with the freedom that is open to them in Jesus.

f. **To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that!** Paul continues the sarcasm, confessing that he is too “weak” to abuse his sheep the way the “super apostles” do. Guilty as charged!

g. **But in whatever anyone is bold – I speak foolishly – I am bold also:** The *most eminent apostles* were **bold** in proclaiming their greatness. So, Paul will be **bold also** but in doing so, he will **speak foolishly**. The rest of the chapter contains Paul’s “foolish boasting” about the things that prove him to be a true apostle.

2. (22-33) Paul’s apostolic credentials.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. 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. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 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; 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; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

a. **Are they Hebrews? So am I:** Paul’s human ancestry was more than enough to qualify him as an apostle. Not only was he **the seed of Abraham**, he was also of the **Israelites**. Not only was he of the **Israelites**, he was of the **Hebrews**, meaning he was a Jew of Judean descent, as opposed to Jews who were born from people coming from areas far from Judea.

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- i. Paul grew up in Tarsus of Cilicia ([Acts 21:39](#)), but this apparently means his parents were Judean Jews who moved to Tarsus either before or after Paul was born.
 - ii. Paul knows very well that his blood ancestry does not make him an apostle or a servant of Jesus, but many of the *most eminent apostles* either said or implied that it was important. Knowing the silliness of this, Paul prefaced his remarks here with “**I speak foolishly.**” Yet, to make a point (to expose the foolishness of the *most eminent apostles* and to glorify the nature of Jesus), he will continue.
- b. **Are they ministers of Christ? – I speak as a fool – I am more:** The *most eminent apostles* claimed to be **ministers of Christ**. When they used this term, it probably sounded like an honored, privileged title. As for Paul, he will claim also to be among the **ministers of Christ**, but he will explain that he means something far different from what the *most eminent apostles* meant.
- i. *Minister* comes from the ancient Greek word *diakonos*, which describes a humble servant or a menial worker. The *most eminent apostles* had inflated the idea of *minister* to make it a title of exaltation and privilege. Paul had no problem with the title *minister*, but he had a big problem with the understanding of the title promoted by the *most eminent apostles* and received by the Corinthian Christians. In the following section, Paul explains what qualifies him to be called a *minister of Christ*. We should expect it to be rather different from what the *most eminent apostles* would claim as their qualifications.
- c. **In labors more abundant:** “I am a minister of Christ because I work harder than any of the other apostles for Jesus’ sake.” Paul said this even more explicitly in [1 Corinthians 15:10](#): *I labored more abundantly than they all.*
- i. In contrast, the *most eminent apostles* saw being a minister of Christ as a matter of *privilege*. In their minds, the more of a minister you were, the less you should have to work and the more others should serve you.
- d. **In stripes above measure:** “I am a minister of Christ because I have been beaten many times for Jesus’ sake.” Paul received beatings from both the Jews (**five times I received forty stripes minus one**) and the Romans (**three times I beaten with rods**).
- i. [Deuteronomy 25:3](#) says: *Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight.* Accordingly, the Rabbis restricted the number of stripes you could give to 39 (**forty stripes minus one**). They did this not out of mercy, but they feared that there might be a miscount and forty stripes would be exceeded by accident.
 - ii. An ancient Jewish writing describes the procedure for receiving **stripes** in a Jewish court: “The two hands of the criminal are bound to a post, and then the servant of the synagogue either pulls or tears off his clothes till he leaves his breast and shoulders bare. A stone or block is placed behind him on which the servant stands; he holds in his hands a scourge made of leather, divided into four

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tails. He who scourges lays one third on the criminal's *breast*, another third on his *right shoulder*, and another on his *left*. The man who receives the punishment is neither *sitting* nor *standing*, but all the while *stooping*; and the man smites with all his strength, with one hand." (Mishna, fol. 22, 2; cited in Clarke)

e. **In prisons more frequently:** "I am a minister of Christ because I have spent a lot of time in prison for Jesus' sake." Paul speaks of being in prison several times, even though Acts only tells us of one instance up to the time he wrote 2 Corinthians (in Philippi, [Acts 16:20-24](#)). This reminds us that as wonderful as the book of Acts is, it is an incomplete record.

f. **In deaths often:** "I am a minister of Christ because I have been close to death many times for Jesus' sake." We know Paul was close to death when an angry crowd tried to execute him by stoning in Lystra ([Acts 14:19](#)), but there were many other times as well.

i. The incident in Lystra (recorded in [Acts 14:19](#)) must be what Paul refers to when he says **once I was stoned**.

g. **Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils:** "I am a minister of Christ because I have traveled many miles for Jesus' sake and have endured many hardships traveling for Jesus' sake." In the modern world, a busy travel schedule can be hard on anyone. Think of what it was like in the ancient world!

i. Through the book of Acts, we read of no less than 18 journeys Paul took by ship, with half of them occurring before the writing of 2 Corinthians. Since the book of Acts is an incomplete record, there were many more in addition to this. Some historians have said that there is no other man in the ancient world who is recorded to have traveled as extensively as Paul did.

h. **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; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness:** "I am a minister of Christ because I have endured many perils and many discomforts for Jesus' sake."

i. All these **perils** simply add up to a hard, stress-filled life:

· **In perils of waters:** This refers to the great dangers Paul faced in crossing rivers as he traveled.

· **In perils of robbers:** One of the worst dangers of travel in the ancient world were muggers ready to rob isolated travelers in the middle of nowhere (as Jesus illustrated in [Luke 10:30](#)).

· **In perils in the city:** Paul experienced many hostile mobs in the cities where he preached ([Acts 13:50](#), [14:5](#), [14:19](#), [16:19](#), and so forth).

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· **In perils in the wilderness:** In his travels, Paul spent many dangerous days and nights **in the wilderness**.

· **In perils in the sea:** This refers to Paul's many shipwrecks and difficulties when traveling by sea.

· **In perils among false brethren:** Paul had the danger of those who said they were brothers and his friends, but were **false brethren** instead ([2 Timothy 4:14](#) is a later example).

ii. **In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness:** In our modern world, we are isolated from so many of the difficulties Paul faced. We can get water and food and warmth so much more easily than Paul ever could. Paul simply *lived a hard life* as a missionary, traveling and preaching the gospel.

iii. It wasn't the mere fact of a hard life that made Paul a true minister of Christ. Many people have hard lives but are in no way servants of Jesus. But for Paul, all these perils and hardships were *freely chosen* because he could have lived differently if he wanted to. But he didn't want to. He wanted to serve Jesus, and if these hardships were part of serving Jesus, he would accept them.

iv. How could the man who lived this life possibly be *happy*? Because he had died to himself! Because Paul could say, *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* ([Galatians 2:20](#)) Because of this, Paul could practice what he preached when he wrote: *we also glory in tribulations* ([Romans 5:3](#)). This wasn't just "spiritual talk" from Paul; he really lived it. Paul could say and mean what he wrote earlier in [2 Corinthians 4:17-18](#): *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

v. The *most eminent apostles*, and the Christian Corinthians who had bought into their worldly lies, must think Paul is *crazy* at this point. They found nothing to boast about in these hardships Paul gloried in. For them such hardships said, "God is not with me. I'm a loser. I'm weak. I'm not happy. My life is too hard." They could only glory in the *image* of power and the appearance of success. If they did not have that image, they felt God was against them. They thought this way because their thinking was worldly, instead of having the mind of Jesus as reflected in [Philippians 2:5-11](#).

vi. "Such is the price that Paul paid. How does that react upon you? Do you congratulate yourself that you have escaped it? One week of such living and we would be done, but Paul went through it for a lifetime and gloried in his infirmities." (Redpath)

vii. The **perils** of Paul's life were really plenty enough to kill any man, but nothing or no one could kill him until God finished His purpose for Paul on this earth.

Sources

Enduringword.com

Jesuswalk.com

Ccel.org

bbsr.com

i. **Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches:** In addition to all the stressful **perils** Paul previously mentioned, he lived **daily** with another burden. Paul lived with a **deep concern for all the churches**.

i. The **perils** Paul mentioned were not everyday occurrences, but his **deep concern for all the churches** never left him. Paul's burdens were not only physical, but they were also emotional.

ii. **Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?** Paul's **deep concern** was not for himself. It was for others – for the **weak** and those **made to stumble**. Paul had many burdens, but few of them were for himself. He, like Jesus, was truly an others-centered person.

iii. Redpath on **what comes upon me daily**: "I could not possibly convey to you adequately in the English language the force of that statement. I tried to picture it in terms of being smothered under a blanket, or by being attacked and crushed by some great animal, for he could not have used a stronger word when he said, in effect, 'That which bears me down, that which is upon me as an intolerable load, that which is a burden, that which is something that I can never shake off day or night. It is with me always. I have no vacation for it ever. It is upon me daily. The care, the compassion, the concern of all the churches.'"

iv. Paul's **deep concern** was not a "faithless fussiness." "This anxiety was based not only on disturbing reports which came to his ears, but on his knowledge of the savage subtlety of the enemy of souls who, he realized, would stop at nothing in his attempts to overthrow the work of the gospel." (Hughes)

j. **If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity:** What is Paul's boast? What are his credentials as an apostle? Only his scars, **the things which concern my infirmity**. The **infirmity** Paul refers to may be a specific illness or weakness; more likely, it is the life of hardship and stress he lived as a whole.

i. The *false apostles*, those *most eminent apostles*, would never dream of boasting in such things. They thought any **infirmity** made one look weak and far from God. Despite that, Paul did not care if it looked foolish in the eyes of the world or those in the church who thought like the world. Paul lived with an eternal perspective, not a worldly perspective.

ii. "I will not boast of my *natural* or *acquired powers*; neither in what *God* has done by me; but rather in what I have *suffered* for *him*." (Clarke)

k. **The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying:** Paul recognizes that what he just wrote may seem incredible to some, and some may doubt Paul actually lived such hardship. Probably even more doubted that Paul could actually *boast* of such hardship. So Paul uses strong language to declare God is his witness that he tells the truth.

Sources

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i. “‘God knoweth.’ He knows what? Knows all the suffering, knows all the trial, knows all the facts, which he has already referred to, that he is led everywhere in triumph all the way. ‘God knoweth.’ That is the secret of his deepest boasting.” (Morgan)

1. In Damascus... I was let down in a basket through a window: This was perhaps the first real peril or hardship Paul faced for Jesus’ sake ([Acts 9:23-25](#)). He thinks way back to this beginning event, perhaps thinking that his escape from Damascus was his “apprenticeship in persecution.” It is as if he says, “This is how my ministry began and this is how it continues.”

i. Hughes says of this Damascus escape, “it was an event which emphasized, at the very beginning of his ministry, his own abject weakness and frailty.”

ii. It illustrates with power the contrast between *Saul of Tarsus* and *Paul the Apostle*. Saul of Tarsus traveled to Damascus full of man’s power and authority, directed against God’s people. Paul the Apostle left Damascus humbly in a basket. Is there anything more descriptive of weakness than being let down in a basket over a wall? “Could we think of anything more likely to rob a man of any sense of dignity than that?” (Morgan)

iii. The reference to **Aretas the king** dates Paul’s escape from Damascus between A.D. 37 and 39. Taking into account the three years mentioned in [Galatians 1:18](#), and that this incident happened at the end of those three years, we can surmise that Paul was converted sometime between A.D. 34 and 36.

QUESTIONS

- **vs 1-4** How easily do you put up with another Jesus being preached?
- What is an example of other Jesus's being preached then and now?
- Why does Paul use the concept of a virgin here?
- How do you tests the spirits to see if they are from God? (1John 4:6)
- **vs 5-12** What are examples of sarcasm in this section?
- **vs 7** What do you suppose would have happened if Paul hadn't preached the gospel to them free for charge?
- **vs 13-15** How do you suppose Paul knew that such men were false apostles?
- How can you identify false apostles?
- And in what way might they mistakenly be viewed as angels of light?
- **vs 19-20** To what extent should Christians tolerate being exploited? (See also Matt 5:39-41)
- **vs 22-33** How does Paul's life differ from your expectations concerning your own Christian life?

Sources

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