**I BOAST OF MY WEAKNESS**

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Key Verse 30

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

**Introduction**



Paul continues to defend his apostleship. Today he boasts about his sufferings and weaknesses. In Corinth, nobody could have boasted about those things like him. But Paul is clear about the reason why he must boast his sufferings and weaknesses. It was because he knew the meaning of suffering for Jesus’ sake. May the Lord help us to follow his good example and to boast our sufferings and weaknesses to serve others.

1. Read verses 16-21a. Why did Paul boast when usually he was reluctant

to talk about himself? (16-18) How did he rebuke the gullible Corinthians?

(19-21a)

1-1, Read verses 16-21a.

I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. **17** In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. **18** Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. **19** You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! **20** In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face. **21** To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!

1-2, Why did Paul boast when usually he was reluctant to talk about himself? (16-18)

***I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. 17 In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. 18 Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast.***

* Paul was reluctant to talk about himself because it was considered to be a foolish thing from God’s eyes. He always wanted to boast as the Lord would.
* Paul said that worldly boasting was not healthy, but Paul reluctantly and inevitably boasted in the way the world did in order to help the Corinthians to overcome their misunderstanding due to the influence of the false apostles.

2 Corinthians 4:4-6 reads,

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5** For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. **6** For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

1-3, How did he rebuke the gullible Corinthians? (19-21a)

***You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! 20 In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face.***

* “You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you…” This verse reminds us of verses 3 and 4.

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. **4** For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

* They might think that they were wise and open minded to embrace and put up with false apostles without no problem. But they even endured the abuse from the super-apostles, by thinking that it’s spiritual to endure such bondage.
* “anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face.” They were so impressed with the image of authority and power of super apostles, they meekly submitted to such abusive treatment.

***21 To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!***

* Paul clarifies here that he is too weak to abuse his sheep in the same way the super apostles do.
* In other words, Paul is always trembling in serving the Lord and in the same mindset he served God’s flocks for they are Jesus’ sheep.

2. Read verses 21b-29. Why was Paul speaking as a fool? (21b) How did he

compare himself with the false apostles? (22-23a) What sufferings did he go

through as a servant of God? (23b-27) Despite many trials, what was his concern as a shepherd? (28-29)

2-1, Read verses 21b-29.

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. **22** Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. **23** Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder,been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. **24** Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, **26** I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. **27** I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. **28** Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.**29** Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

2-2, Why was Paul speaking as a fool? (21b)

***Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about.***

* The most eminent apostles were bold in saying their greatness. Paul will be bold also but he will speak like a fool.
* However, his foolish boasting in the following passage will prove him to be a true apostle. Paul has a clear goal in his boasting that he wants to build up the churches.

2-3, How did he compare himself with the false apostles? (22-23a)

***Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.***

* Paul’s ancestry was mentioned first. He was one of Abraham’s descendants. He was also of the Israelites. Not only was he of the Israelites, he was of the Hebrews, meaning that he was a Jew of Judean descent.
* Paul grew up in Tarsus of Cilicia, but his parents were Judean Jews who moved to Tarsus.
* Paul knows his ancestry very well. But it does not make him an apostle nor a servant of God.

***23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more.***

* Contrary to false teachers who valued the human background, Paul considered this kind of comparison to be a foolish thing. “I am talking out of my mind like this”
* But, to make a clear point to expose their foolishness of the false apostles and to glorify the nature of Jesus, he will inevitably continue.
* The false teachers claimed to be real servants of Christ. As for Paul, he will claim also to be among the servants of Christ, even more. But he will explain that he means something far different from what they meant.
* The title of servants is not meant to inflate people. Rather Paul had a sense of problem about them in that they ended up using their title to promote themselves.
* In the following passage, Paul explains what qualifies him to be called a servant of Christ.

2-4, What sufferings did he go through as a servant of God? (23b-27)

***I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.***

* First of all, Paul talked about how much he worked. In other words, a true servant of God is not those who talk big, but one who works and suffers for Christ.
* He elaborated external trails in verses 23-27. Paul’s external trials came from hard work, persecution by both the Jews and Gentiles, a constant sense of danger, and bodily sufferings, such as sleeplessness, hunger, and thirst, and being cold and naked.
* As a God’s servant, he suffered a lot. Usually people try to avoid sufferings and hard work to live an easy life, for it is our nature and desire.
* Even Christians do not want to suffer and are apt to adopt easy way to serve the Lord if possible. If there is such way, we think that it will be good. But it is possible only in theory. In reality, there is no such thing. No cross, no glory.

1 Corinthians 15:9-11 reads,

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **10** But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.**11** Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

* In great contrast, the false apostles believed that being servants of Christ is a matter of privilege or title. In their carnal minds, the more you are privileged, the less you have to work and the more others should admire you and serve you.
* One question might come to our hearts. What is the meaning and purpose of hard work and suffering? As godly sorrow is different from worldly sorrow in terms of no regret, our suffering is different from worldly suffering.
* Since Adam disobeyed, we have been stuck in the cursed life of suffering. But being suffered for Christ has meaning!
* It makes us to be like Jesus. Sufferings for Christ are the guarantee of future glory. Before knowing this truth, Peter tried to seek glory without suffering. He was rebuked by Jesus as Satan. But in the book of Peter, he encouraged others to suffer for Christ.
* Paul also knew the deep meaning of suffering and even desired to taste suffering and death to know Jesus and His resurrection. May the Lord raise up many servants of God who really grasp the meaning of sufferings!
* In chapter 4, he already confessed that all external troubles and sufferings are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 reads,

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. **17** For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18** So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2-5, Despite many trials, what was his concern as a shepherd? (28-29)

***Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?***

* These two verses are about internal suffering and pain. Paul faced pressure daily from his concern for all the churches out of his great shepherd’s heart.
* One time the Holy Spirit warned him about the impending danger in Jerusalem he insisted on going there. But Paul faced the music boldly with his passion to fulfil world mission for Christ’s desire.

* Here when his sheep were weak, Paul felt their weakness as his own and probably cried out in prayer day and night. When someone sinned, Paul’s heart burned with holy fire to save them by any means.
* In this way, Paul suffered much, but he taught us a right attitude toward suffering. Paul was not satisfied with pioneering all the churches. Rather he faced daily the pressure of his deep concern for all the churches, in Achaia, Macedonia, and etc.

3. Read verses 30-33. What did Paul resolve to boast about? (30) How did he show

his weaknesses because of his calling from the Father and Jesus? (31-33)

3-1, Read verses 30-33.

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. **31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. **32** In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. **33** But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

3-2, What did Paul resolve to boast about? (30)

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

* Paul resolved to boast of the things that show his weakness. What kind of boasting is it? Paul boasts in a way contrary to that of the world.
* Many people boast about their achievements, their children, and so on. They think that if they do not boast, they will be ignored and will lose the joy of life.
* The main root of their boasting is inner pride. Pride is Satan’s stronghold. The Bible says that God opposes the proud, and gives grace to the humble.

1 Peter 5:5-6 reads,

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” **6** Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

* Thus Paul spoke of and called his attention to his own weaknesses rather than his strength. This form of boasting reveals God’s power and encourages others.
* Everyone has weaknesses to boast about, if they are truly honest and willing to do so!
* While Paul boasts of things that show his weakness, the false teachers would never imagine of boasting in such things. They thought that any weakness made them weak and far from Christ. 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.

3-3, How did he show his weaknesses because of his calling from the Father and Jesus? (31-33)

***31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying.***

* Paul recognizes that what he just wrote may seem odd and incredible to some believers in the church, and they may doubt that Paul actually lived such hard lives of suffering and pain like Thomas in John’s gospel.
* So Paul uses strong languages to declare that God is his witness and he tells the truth. God knows what? God knows all the suffering and all the rials, and knows all the facts.

***32 In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33 But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.***

* Paul gave a specific example to verify his truthfulness. This was perhaps the first real peril or hardship Paul had face for Jesus’ name sake. His funny escape in a basket from a window in the wall was considered to be kind of “apprenticeship in persecution.” Basically, he seemed to try to saying here, “this is how my ministry began and this is how it continues even now!”
* What a drastic change in the Lord, Jesus Christ who called him! He was full of zeal and passion to persecute Christians in Damascus. But Christ caught him as a servant of God and had him escape in a basket over a wall. Could we think of anything more likely to rob a man of any sense of dignity than that?
* Aretas the king dates paul’s escape from Damascus between a.d. 37-39.

**Conclusion**

People don’t want to expose their weaknesses, failure, or poverty. Even Christians do not want to worship God who looked like a loser. Rather people are seeking for prosperity gospel to appeal to their desires. But we are very thankful in that today Paul taught us about the true meaning and purpose of our suffering for Jesus Christ. He could boast about his weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties for the sake of Christ. He participated in sufferings of Christ and experienced the power of resurrection. We don’t need to fear our weaknesses or hide them. Our weaknesses are the ample opportunity to come to Christ and experience His power. Amen.

**One word: If I must boast!**