

“If I Must Needs Glory ...”

“... I will glory of the things that concern my weakness” (2 Cor. 11:30). This is the concluding statement from Paul’s fourth list of his hardships which have appeared so far in his Corinthians epistles. Those lists are 1 Cor. 4:9-13, 2 Cor. 4:8-14, 2 Cor. 6:4-10, and this one, 2 Corinthians 11:23-30. A fifth, but much shorter list, is found in 12:10.

This fourth list follows Paul’s request that his brethren receive him, even if they regard him foolish. A bit of irony follows that request when he states, “For ye bear with the foolish gladly, being wise yourselves. For ye bear with a man if he bringeth you into bondage, if he devoureth you, if he taketh you captive, if he exalteth himself, if he smiteth you on the face” (2 Cor. 11:19-20). These stinging words were a thinly-veiled reference to the deeds of the false apostles with whom some of the Corinthians were enamored. The injuries and insults these brethren suffered from the false brethren were in essence true, if not literal.

So Paul tests the credentials of things of which the false teachers apparently boasted. “Are they Hebrews? so am I. Am they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I” (2 Cor. 11:23). There was nothing these brethren in Corinth boasted of regarding fleshly credentials that Paul could not equally have boasted of. And, very likely he could have truly boasted of greater attainments than they — brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the highest respected teachers ever among the Jews. And, he had been an apt and zealous disciples of that teacher; a “rising star” in Judaism. “I advanced in the Jews’ religion beyond many of my own countrymen, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal. 1:14). But the things false teachers in Corinth regarded so highly, while held equally and in surpassing degree by Paul, was regarded by Paul as worthless. He wrote, “What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ” (Phil. 3:7). With Paul these external things which some prized so highly were by him regarded as garbage — gaining Christ and being found in him was his ultimate ambition and goal (Phil. 3:8-9).

So Paul, having discussed fleshly attainments of which he was equal to and superior to them, turned to another comparison. “Are they ministers of Christ (I speak as one beside himself) I more: in labors more abundantly; in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times I received forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods. Once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city and in perils of the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, there is which presseth upon me daily. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is caused to stumble, and I burn not?” (2 Cor. 11:23-29).

Wow! Beatings, floggings, stoning, hunger, thirst, labor, fasting, cold, nakedness, daily, and pressing dangers! To read such a list of the trials this apostle suffered makes me

ashamed: I have suffered none of those things for Christ. And I am certain the false apostles at Corinth had not either.

To cap off his suffering and humiliation for Christ, the apostle concludes with a most humiliating experience. "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king guarded the city of the Damascenes in order to take me: and through a window was I let down in a basket by the wall and escaped his hands" (2 Cor. 11:32f). How strong was the faith of Paul. How great Paul's hope! Yet none of those things were surprising to him. He went into service for Christ with his eyes wide open. The Lord told Ananias ere he met and baptized Paul: "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:10).

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