

2 Corinthians

WEEK FIVE

1

VI. Paul, the Corinthians, & the “Super Apostles” (10:1-13:14)

2

Highlights of Chapters 10-13

- Paul's defense of his apostleship.
- The "Super Apostles".
- The Fool's Speech.
- Spiritual warfare.
- The marks of true discipleship.
- God's strength made perfect in weakness.
- Discernment to recognise false leaders and false teaching.

Definitions

Apostleship/Apostolic Authority: Must have been with Jesus. Commissioned by Jesus to preach the gospel, teach, and establish churches.

The apostles were the original teachers and interpreters of Jesus' teachings and were responsible to ensure that others presented the message accurately.

They played an authoritative role in the church's government and practices. The apostles were to love, encourage, and inspire leaders and congregations.

Insiders:

- (a) A majority of the Corinthians who have submitted to Paul's apostolic authority (7:5).**
- (b) A minority who refuse to repent and continue in sexual immorality and debauchery (12:21; 13:2). This group continues to be enthralled and influenced by the "Super Apostles".**

Outsiders:

Newcomers among the Corinthians who have influenced a minority of the congregation (Paul sarcastically calls them "Super Apostles") as well as false prophets, deceivers, and emissaries of Satan.

5

The "Super Apostles":

- They are rhetorically gifted, placing great emphasis on knowledge and speech (10:10; 11:6).**
- They claim they perform miracles and enjoy mystical experiences.**
- They engage in self-serving commendations.**
- They measure themselves against themselves.**
- They are self-centered, arrogant, and brag about everything.**

6

Rhetorical devices: Styles of speech intended to persuade, encourage or provoke listeners to understand or reconsider a point of view.

The role of the fool as a rhetorical device: When a speaker plays the role of the fool, they become a truth-teller in disguise. The fool will use metaphors, analogies, comparisons, irony, and even humour to expose the foolishness in an argument in light of what is truly authentic.

Paul plays the role of the fool in his Fool's Speech in **11:1-12:10**.

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Paul, the Corinthians, & the "Super Apostles" (10:1-18)

Paul defends his apostolic authority (10:1-6)

¹ By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you – I, Paul, who am 'timid' when face to face with you, but 'bold' towards you when away!

² ... When I come, I don't want to be as bold as I expect to be towards some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

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4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Commentary

Paul will be gracious and gentle (depending on his audience).

Accusations against Paul:

- **Paul is “timid face to face; bold when far away”.**
- **Paul’s decisions and conduct are based on motives and standards of this world—in the flesh.**

Paul's response:

I live in this world, but my weapons are not of this world (as those of my opponents—fancy talk/earthly knowledge).

Spiritual Warfare:

Our weapons—from God—have divine power to demolish strongholds (and every argument).

Every part of our life—motives and actions—are in obedience to Christ (captive).

Paul & the Corinthians (10:7-11)

⁷ You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. ⁸ I boast about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down.

They say Paul's letters are "weighty and forceful", but in person, Paul is weak, unimpressive, and his speaking amounts to nothing.

Commentary

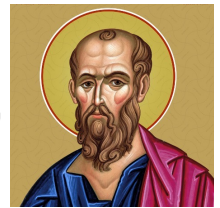
The Corinthians are looking through the wrong lens.

The “Super Apostles”:

- Tear down the Corinthians while Paul builds up.
- Judge by appearance.
- Claim that Paul is not living “in Christ” to the same degree as they are.
- Demean Paul’s physical appearance (a low blow).

Stereotype of Paul (ca A.D. 200):

A little man, balding, bushy eyebrows meeting, hooked nose, and bow-legged.



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Paul & the “Super Apostles” (10:12-18)

12 We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

13 We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you. 14 We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ.

14

15 Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that our sphere of activity will greatly expand, ¹⁶ so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory. ¹⁷ But, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.' ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Commentary

Paul refuses to compare himself to the "Super Apostles":

- **They commend themselves.**
- **Their fancy talk and human knowledge have no power.**
- **They measure themselves by themselves.**
- **They compare themselves with themselves.**
- **They brag about everything.**

Accusers claim that Paul is meddling in their jurisdiction.

Paul's response: Are you serious? I founded the church. All were saved under my ministry. The "Super Apostles" take credit for another person's work and then boast about what they have done!

"The regions beyond" —the heart of a missionary.

"Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. It is not the one who commends himself, but the one who the Lord commends."

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The Fool's Speech (11:1-12:10)

The Fool's Speech is the most dominant theme in chapters 10-13.

- **Introduction to the Fool's Speech (11:1-21a).**
- **The Fool's Speech (11:21b-12:1).**
- **Revelation and Thorn in the Flesh (12:1-10).**

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Introduction to the Fool's Speech (11:1-12)

¹ I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me! ² I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. ³ But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the snake's cunning, some have been led astray. 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. ⁵ I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles'.

⁶ I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. ⁷ Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.

10 As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody will stop this boasting of mine. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

12 And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about.

Commentary

Paul longs for the Corinthians to return to the gospel that transformed their lives.

But their minds have been led astray; and so easily. They have been deceived by the serpent's cunning.

The "Super Apostles" preached a different "Jesus", and a different gospel. The intruders' spirit was different than the Spirit of Christ!

The Corinthians liked the message and the messengers!

Undercutting the opponents' aim (11:7-12).

Was it a sin that I preached for free?

They claim to preach for free, but they accept money for their preaching (11:7-10). They are peddlers of the Word (2:17) and they tamper with it (4:17).

The Corinthians put up with these deceivers.

Continued (11:13-15)

¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.

¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Commentary

Paul describes the “Super Apostles”.

The “Super Apostles” are “false apostles and deceitful workers”.

They masquerade as apostles of Christ—but they are just like Satan who masquerades as an angel of light. No wonder his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

The “Super Apostles” will get what they deserve.

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Continued (11:16-21a)

¹⁶ 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!

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Commentary

**Paul speaking to the Corinthians:
Don't take me for a fool.
But since you tolerate fools, I shall speak as one.**

**You say you are wise!
The "Super Apostles" have:**

- **enslaved you**
- **exploited you**
- **taken advantage of you**
- **then slapped you in the face**

"To my shame, we were too weak with you!"

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The Fool's Speech (11:21b-12:10)

Comparison: Opponents and Paul (11:21b-23a)

***21 ... 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 ...***

28

Commentary

Paul boasts by comparing himself with the false apostles. He is equal, but also better ...

Hebrews	are they? So am I
Israelites	are they? So am I
Seed of Abraham	are they? So am I
Ministers of Christ	are they? I am better

The first three are related to identity (can't be earned).

29

I am a “better” servant of Christ.

Paul had superior credentials:

- **Tip of spear, preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.**
- **Brokered circumcision controversy between Jew and Gentile.**
- **Recruited and mentored dozens of leaders.**
- **Planted churches in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia ([Romans 15:18](#)).**

However, Paul chooses to focus on his sufferings and the “marks” he bears on his body.

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Paul's Weaknesses (11:23b-33)

23 ... 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.

31

27 I have laboured 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? 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 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.

32

Commentary

Paul's weaknesses:

- Exposed to death at least 12x (11:22-25).
- Whipped 5x: 39 stripes (13 to the chest, 26 to the back).
- Rodded 3x (like birch rods tied together).
- Stoned 1x by the Jews as a capital punishment for adulterers, blasphemers, and apostates.
- Shipwrecked 3x.

Dangers:

- Dangers in journeys: Paul was not a tourist. Travelled 16,000 km, mostly on foot.
- Dangers from rivers and robbers.
- Dangers from the Jews and Gentiles.
- Dangers in the city, in the country, and at sea.
- Dangers from false brothers (Last in the list and it stands alone; The biggest danger of all).

Personal impact on Paul (11:27-29):

- **By labor and toil.**
- **In sleepless nights; in hunger and thirst.**
- **In cold and nakedness.**
- ***But most of all, anxiety for the churches.***

A humiliating escape (11:30-33):

In Damascus escaping in a basket through a window and down the city wall.

Paul's weaknesses: sufferings—just like Christ—the marks of an apostle. And it was in the midst of his “weaknesses” that Christ was made strong.

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Paul's Revelation (12:1-6)

¹ I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. ³ And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – ⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

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⁵ I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.

Commentary

***Paul gives them a revelation story without a revelation.**

“Caught up to the third heaven.”

Paul says, “the experience is too precious to share”.

Jesus appointed Paul as an apostle. This revelation is the basis for Paul’s apostleship.

Thorn in the Flesh (12:7-10)

⁷ or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

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Commentary

***Paul gives them a healing story without a healing.**

Thorn or *skolops* (splinter, thorn, barb).

A messenger of Satan was given to Paul as a constant reminder (present tense) lest he should be overlifted.

And it was God who gave him the *skolops*.

It was God’s will.

We don’t know what “*skolops*” mean (splinter, thorn, barbs) or know if the problem is “physical” or “relational”.

40

Paul prayed three times for the “thorn” to be removed. God’s “gift” pinned him to the earth in humility. But God’s “grace was sufficient”.

It is good that we don’t know the nature of Paul’s “thorn”. We can fill in the blanks and apply it to ourselves.

God’s power is made perfect in our weakness.

Summary

Paul’s opponents experienced “visions and revelations” which were filled with arrogance and pride. Paul was dependent upon the Lord. God’s power is made perfect in his weakness.

Paul “boasts” of his weaknesses because he is confident that it is precisely in those weaknesses where Christ is made strong.

Foolishness, boasting, and weaknesses are the three major themes of Paul’s speech.

Paul's Love & Concern for the Corinthians (12:11-21)

Paul's deep love and concern for the Corinthians.

Paul contrasts his decision not to accept money with the "Super Apostles" who manipulated and took advantage.

Paul sets the stage for his upcoming visit, encouraging the Corinthians to do what is right on their own initiative (13:1-10).

Theological Reflection and Self-examination (13:5-6)

⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?

Self-examination and self-reflection:

- **To encourage the Corinthians to reflect on God's grace and their relationship with Christ.**
- **To reflect on God's grace and power in the face of weakness.**
- **To reflect on demonstrating God's grace in real life.**

Paul's Self-examination

- Paul never belittled what he had done through Christ. He knew he worked harder than the other apostles, but all the results of his work was God working through him.
- Paul regarded himself as a product of God's grace. *"By the grace of God, I am what I am"* (1 Cor. 15:10).
- Paul made no apologies for himself. He knew his strengths and his weaknesses—all came from God. God to Ananias about Paul: *"He is a chosen vessel"* (Acts 9:15).

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Paul's Principles for Ministry

- Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).
- When I am weak, then I am strong (12:10).
- He that glories, let him glory in the Lord (10:17).
- We seek not yours, but you (12:14).
- We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (5:10).
- Do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

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Paul's Influence on Contemporary Society

Theology

- **Fundamental tenets of the faith: Theology, Doctrine of Sin, Christology, Soteriology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology**
- **Transformative power of grace.**
- **Spiritual gifts and fruits of the Spirit.**
- **Holy Spirit.**
- **God's strength in our weakness.**
- **Divine comfort and divine generosity.**

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- **Diversity and Inclusiveness: Equality of persons.**
- **Personal Morality and Ethical Behavior.**
- **Church as a Community: Unity, love, forgiveness, fellowship, teams, finances.**
- **Missionary Practices.**
- **Society: Family, interpersonal relationships, gender equality, women in ministry.**

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Final Words & Doxology (13:11-14)

11 Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.