

Exegetical Notes – 2 Corinthians 11:1-33

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2 Corinthians 11:1-33

(It seems that the Corinthian Church was infiltrated by those who Paul calls “super apostles” (verse 5). These men are not really “apostles” at all. But they are people who set themselves up as authorities in the church. They lead people into theological error and cause divisions within the body of Christ. Always beware of a divisive person. They do not submit themselves to the authority of the word of God or those that God has appointed over them, including the Apostle Paul. The problem is that the Corinthians were prone to listen to these people and to be led by them. In this chapter, Paul calls the Corinthians to account for this error. At points in his argument, he resorts to sarcasm.)

Verses 1-4

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. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. ³ 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.

- Paul is about to confront the Corinthians with a major concern. His presentation will require him to speak about himself in a way which may seem “boastful” to them. So, he asks them to allow him some liberty in his presentation before they reject his argument.
- He tells them that he is “jealous for them.” He does not say that he is jealous OF them. He wants to present them to Christ as a father would present his daughter to her husband, without spot or blemish. But he says that they have been deceived and led astray just as was Eve led astray by Satan (see Genesis 3).

- This deception is the result of teachers who have come among them who challenged his teaching. These teachers have introduced theological error through their own teaching and rather than spewing out the error, the Corinthians have bought into it. They have rejected his teachings in favor of the false teaching of others among them. They accept it and swallow it blindly.

Verses 5-6

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.

- Paul refers to these false teachers as “super apostles.” It is a sarcastic name. Apparently, they are a sight to behold. They are eloquent and impressive. They put on a fancy show.
- Paul, on the other hand, is what he is. By comparison to these others, he seems dull and lackluster. But, he speaks truth and he does know of what he speaks. Like Jesus, he speaks with the authority of God.
- He has attempted to show this to the Corinthians by his example, by the way he lived among them.

Verses 7-11

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 in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. ¹¹ Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

- During his two years stay in Corinth, Paul did not receive support from the Corinthians. Other churches provided funding for his ministry in Corinth. Apparently, this is not how the “super apostles” did it. They expected to be supported lavishly by the Corinthians when they were in Corinth. The Corinthians, apparently, thought that you get what you pay for. So those who cost much were of more worth than was Paul.
- In verses 10 & 11, Paul is getting “wound up.” He is about to let his frustration go.

Verses 12-15

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. 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.

- Paul accuses the “super apostles” of being what they are: false, deceitful, fakes! They look like “angels of light” but they are agents of Satan who have infiltrated the church to lead people away from Christ and to aggrandize themselves. In the end, God, himself, will judge them and they will get what they deserve.

Verses 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!

- “Let no one take me for a fool.” Paul is not deceived by these “super apostles.” He knows what they are doing and what they are saying about him.
- In defending himself, he may appear to be boasting about himself in a worldly way (see 2 Corinthians 10:12-18). It may seem to some that in speaking of himself in this way, he is behaving exactly as do these false teachers.
- He accuses the Corinthians of allowing these false teachers to abuse them.
- So, even though it may seem to them that he is acting as do the false teachers, he is not! He is not, because his motives are entirely different. His concern is to lead them deeper into Christ by all he does and teaches. He does not want to exploit them, but rather to enable them.

Verses 21b-33

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?

³⁰ 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.

- Paul now lays out the history of his ministry. He explains how his ministry has led him to endure hardship and suffering. He explains that, in all this, he has been true to the Lord. This is not what the “super apostles” do. They flee hardship and run from adversity.
- That Paul has been willing to lay himself down in service to God should recommend him to the Church. It is not in himself, nor for himself, that he has done all this. It is to glorify God. This alone should be the goal of every believer, to GLORIFY GOD above self and to shine in the world as lights which lead others to Jesus. Believers seek to glorify God, not themselves.

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