**The Cost of Ministry**

***2 Corinthians 11:16-33***

When I was a youth pastor in Southlake, Texas, the church where I served endured a bitter church split. The pastor of the church became the target of unfair attacks and slander. The people who previously loved one another, now pointed fingers in anger at each other. The work of the Gospel ground to a halt as this church fight raged through the congregation. The strain upon my pastor affected his health, his joy, his outlook.

About a year and a half after many angry members left the church, the Lord directed me to seek a different ministry position. I really did not have much of a focus where I might go. I simply wanted to serve the LORD wherever He sent me. But I did have one request, “LORD, send me to a church that is at peace with itself. Lord, I do not think I am wise enough in my tender years nor strong enough to lead a church through the kind of fight that we just experienced. So please, send me to a church that is at peace with itself.”

In 1993, the Lord opened the door for a 29 year old to become the pastor at Bethany. And my prayer was truly answered. Bethany had a number of weaknesses as any church does, but infighting was not one of them. This was a church at peace within itself.

One of the first comments that many of the senior saints had for me was, *“Pastor, I am praying for you! I know that you have a giant target on your back. You are our leader and Satan will attack you, discourage you, tempt you and hurt you. I want you to know that I pray for you every day.”* People like Char/Lowell Wallen and Christine Barrett and Bill/Juanita Kurtz and many others would tell me something like that quite often And for the first 14 years or so of my time here at Bethany, I would nod in appreciation and yet at the same time think, *“Yes, Satan is real and he prowls like a roaring lion to devour me. But I do not feel any special intensity to his assault against my soul. I am not sure that I know what this person means in saying that I have a target on my back.”*

I think that the LORD protected me in those early ministry years from strong discouragement in a highly unusual way. In those days, I would listen with sympathy to other pastors tell about their troubles and spiritual attacks and I would think, “*I am thankful to God that I am not enduring what they are enduring. I feel like I am isolated from so much of the troubles that many of faithful pastors have.”* But then, about 14 years ago, God in His sovereign wisdom and kindness, chose to allow Satan to have greater access to my life and to our church family. **He is the LORD over all . . . even the devil.** So I know it was His sovereign will to bring some unusual hardships and spiritual attacks into our precious family. In fact, while I would say that in the first 14 years of ministry at Bethany, I experienced less spiritual attack than most pastors. I would say in that in the last 14, I have caught up with and surpassed most of my colleagues in this department.

I do not say this to garner any sympathy or pity! Self-pity is an ugly sin and I want no part of it!

**Truth: Nothing in all the world is more meaningful, more joy inducing, more eternally rewarding, more privileged, more noble, more honorable than to be part of Jesus’ ministry in this world!!** Ministry to the LORD is the greatest way to invest our lives.

Friends, I urge you not to feel sorry for anyone in Christian ministry!! This is the most meaningful expression of our calling as saints, our gifting, our physical life, our talents and our time! **Yet as we open our Bibles to 2 Corinthians 11:16-33, we are reminded of the painful cost of Christian ministry.** This cost is true of occupational ministry as well as lay ministry.

**Main Idea: Ministry to Jesus is an experience of suffering. Those who enter ministry for Jesus should expect to receive pain and assaults as part of the mission.**

Of course, the joy of ministry outweighs the pain!!

*“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Rom._8:18)*)*

*16 So we do not lose heart . . . 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16–18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._4:16)*)*

Again, no one in ministry should feel sorry for themselves regardless of the suffering we may endure. The suffering is but for a moment. AND the suffering is PRODUCING for us a joy that endures and is inexpressible!

But today, Paul calls our attention to the cost that we should expect when we engage in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was crucified for His claims and if we follow Him, we must not expect a bed of ease.

**The Cause of Foolish Conversations: Satan’s deception**

*“I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little.” (2 Corinthians 11:16* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:16)*)*

Paul repeats what he said earlier in this chapter:

*“I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!” (2 Corinthians 11:1* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:1)*)*

Paul hates to defend himself against the false “super apostles” who have gained a following in the church at Corinth. **But he must or the gospel will be lost on this congregation!**

Many of the Corinthian believers had been convinced by these false teachers that Paul does **not really care for them**, that he has **not been sent from God**, that he is **selfish in his motives**, that he **lacks spiritual power**, that he does not have **the resume necessary to lead this church.** These ungodly men boasted about their accomplishments all the while using their position to take advantage of the church.

Paul sees that danger. **If the Corinthians follow these men, they will follow a false Gospel and be led astray from Jesus**. So Paul does what he does not WANT to do: He boasts in His qualifications and his accomplishments.

**Keep in mind that his “boasting” is NOT out of any self-serving motive.** His boasting is out of love to rescue this church from Satan’s deception.

*“I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little.” (2 Corinthians 11:16* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:16)*)*

Paul knows that any “boasting” by a follower of Jesus is inconsistent with the Gospel.

*“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#1Cor._4:7)*)*

Everything we have that is worth anything has been given to us by God. Think of what you have that possesses value. **Do you have anything that God did not give you? Begin with the spiritual blessings**. Forgiveness of sin. Adoption into God’s family. Baptism in the Spirit. **But then move to the physical blessings:** Wife and children. Grandchildren. Job. House. **If we boast about what we possess, we rob God of the glory that is due to Him. Every good thing we experience in this life comes from our generous Father!**

*“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.” (2 Corinthians 10:17–18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._10:17)*)*

**Truth: Christian boasting is a contradiction.**

Yet the false teachers have a hold on so many in the Corinthian church that Paul does what he does not wish to do. He boasts about his resume as a trusted spiritual leader. This has to be done for the sake of these deluded brothers and sisters.

*18 Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. 19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!” (2 Corinthians 11:17–21* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:17)*)*

The boasting of the false teachers has been effective in confusing the immature believers in this church.

Paul lays into the false teachers with strong language. **“You gladly bear with fools!”** He says that these guys “make slaves of you” by twisting the Gospel of freedom into a message of legalistic slavery.

They “devour” you as they manipulate emotions to give financially to them.

They “take advantage of you” with false promises. The image here is of a bird caught in a snare or a fish on a hook.

They “put on airs” by taking your eyes off of Jesus and on their ‘power’ and impressive speech.

They “strike you in the face” by insulting and embarrassing you. And yet you endure their abuse.

*21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!” (2 Corinthians 11:21* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:17)*)*

Sarcasm. We were too weak to influence you through threats, intimidation, manipulation and arrogance.

What is Paul doing? He is going negative!

**Truth: Sometimes spiritual leaders have to be negative in order to preserve the positive.**

**Question: When this letter is read in the congregation, do you think everyone voted to accept it as gospel truth?** No. Some undoubtedly became really angry over it. But Paul risks their anger in hopes that the church might be rescued.

**Why did Paul have to boast?** From a human standpoint, it is because of the false teachers gaining influence. But **Paul points to an evil influence that is stronger that evil people.**

*I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! 2 For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. 3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:1–3* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:1)*)*

“Simplicity” means “singleness of devotion”. Satan is active to take our eyes off of Jesus. He will use any means necessary. He will use false teachers. He will use grumblers. He will use moral failures. He will use political unrest. He will use pandemics. He will use trials. Satan is working behind the scenes to keep us from a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus.

Satan tempts us to listen to his lies, then to ponder them, the to respond to them with emotion, and then to act upon them. This is what Satan did at the beginning of time in the Garden, and he is active to this day!!

**How does Satan work in a church family? He most often uses people who lead others away from a focus on Jesus!**

*13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:13)*)*

**Truth: Satan works to promote fleshly leaders and to convince God’s people to follow them. Satan works to undermine Spirit-led leaders and to convince God’s people to turn against them.**

Application: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:15–16a* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Matt._7:15)*)*

**The Cause of Foolish Conversations: Satan’s deception**

**The Cost of Faithful Ministry: Severe difficulties.**

Do you remember Jesus’ words to Ananias about Paul after he was converted on the road to Damascus?

*But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”” (Acts 9:15–16* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Acts_9:15)*)*

Not “show him how many churches he will plant”. Not “how many converts come through his work. Not “how he will write the NT”. Not “how famous he will be”. But “how much he must suffer”.

Paul is seeking to prove the genuineness of his love for this church. He seeks to convince them by pointing to his suffering for Jesus as evidence that he is a true ambassador for Jesus.

*“21 But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.” (2 Corinthians 11:21–23* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:21)*)*

**Truth: The ministry of Jesus is a ministry of earthly suffering. No one who enters ministry for Jesus should expect to be free from pain and trials that are caused by ministry.**

Matthew Henry, one of the old commentators, has something to say about this. He says, *“When the apostle would prove himself an extraordinary minister, he proves that he had been a extraordinary sufferer.”*

The book of Acts tells us some of Paul’s sufferings. But not all of them. Many Paul lists here that are not talked about at all in Acts.

*24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned.” (2 Corinthians 11:24–25a* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:24)*)*

The forty lashes less one are a punishment that the Jewish authorities handed out. The beating with rods was a punishment the Romans handed out.

*WILLIAM BARCLAY: The detailed regulations for scourging are in the Mishnah, which is the book in which the Jewish traditional law was codified. "They bind his two hands to a pillar on either side, and the minister of the synagogue lays hold on his garment-. . .so that he bares his chest. A stone is set behind him on which the minister of the synagogue stands with a strap of calf-hide in his hand, doubled and re-doubled, . . . The handpiece of the strap is one handbreadth long and one handbreadth wide, . . . He gives him one third of the stripes in front and two thirds behind, and he may not strike him when he is standing or when he is sitting but only when he is bending down ... and he that smites smites with one hand and with all his might. If he dies under his hand, the scourger is not culpable. But if he gives him one stripe too many, and he dies, he must escape into exile because of him."* That is what Paul suffered five times, a scourging so severe that it was liable to kill a man.

Imagine the scars on Paul’s body. **Illustration: Looking at scars with my grandson.** Told some stories. Falling off bike when I was 10. Etc. . . Every scars has a story.

*“From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” (Galatians 6:17* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Gal._6:17)*)*

*25b Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;” (2 Corinthians 11:25b–26* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:25)*)*

What could Paul have done to be “safe”? Stop serving Jesus! **Cesar Cortez, “God’s first rule is not ‘Safety first!’”**

Travel in the first century was filled with danger. First time shipwrecked then after that terrible ordeal, Paul books his next boat trip!!

*danger from false brothers;” (2 Corinthians 11:25b–26* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:25)*)*

**Truth: A constant problem in the ministry of Jesus is treachery from within.**

Every church has members who are false. Every church. Judas. Simon Magnus. Demas. Are all examples. Jesus tells us NOT to try to root false brothers out until it becomes obvious by their actions and their teaching. But treachery from false brothers who act like they are followers of Jesus and give testimony to Jesus is an expected problem for the church that will continue until Jesus returns.

**What is Paul doing here?** He is not asking for pity!! Far from it! He is testifying that Jesus is worthy!! Jesus is worth suffering for. Jesus is worth giving one’s life for.

*27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (2 Corinthians 11:27)*

What stress Paul endures as the result of Jesus’ love for him!!

**Illustration: In Texas, tempted to quit ministry. Slander. Opposition. Little three year old girl, “I hate you!!”** Looking for a different way to invest my life. Jesus: **“If nothing about your trials were to change, but I were to ask you to suffer every day for my sake, would you be willing to do it?”** Yes!!

*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” (Mark 8:34–35* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Mark_8:34)*)*

*Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.” (2 Timothy 2:3–4* [*NAS95*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/NAS95S#2Tim._2:3)*)*

I thank God that Paul was willing to suffer for Jesus. My life is sooooo enriched because Paul endured suffering like a good soldier! Question: What blessing do you and I experience that was not the result of some faithful disciple being willing to suffer?

Illustration: English Bible in your hands. A guy named William Tyndale was burned at the stake in order for us to have this Bible and benefit from it.

**Truth: Suffering for Jesus is always filled with eternal meaning. No suffering for Christ falls fruitless to the ground.**

Illustration: “Freedom is not free.” Statement to point to men and women who serve in armed forces to protect our freedom and way of life. Lots of sacrifices to give us the gift of free worship.

Danny, in high school. “I am planning to join the Air Force.” First response, “Rats.” I knew what he might have to suffer . . . perhaps even die. “Why Danny?” “Someone has to do it.” Yes. No freedom without many willing to suffer.” After initial “Rats”. Thankful for his willingness to engage in such a noble life.

Jackson asked to join a full-time ministry. Jackson asked me what I thought. Great job. Good life. At first, “Rats.” I first thought of the pain Jackson would endure if he does go into ministry. But then thankful for he and Taylor’s faith to entertain such a question.

Two categories of people should be aware of the suffering of those on the front line:

1. Those volunteering to be part of the frontline. No one should enter ministry if they are not willing to suffer in it.

2. Those who benefit from those who suffer on the frontline. We are right to support one another, encourage one another and make each other’s ministry a joy.

*28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:28* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:27)*)*

I used to think that this was a “throw away” addition to the serious forms of suffering that preceded it. Now I consider this to be the climax of Paul’s pain.

I have known some of the daily pressure in the care of this church. Nothing compared to Paul who had so many churches to care for and who was a man of complete devotion to Christ. But some. Many sleepless nights. Many tearful prayers. Many weary labors. Many spiritual battles. Many deep burdens and sorrows as I have had the honor to walk with you through excruciating trials. Many conflicts. Much opposition. I too feel like a fool, but I will share one specific.

Illustration: About 8 years ago, I shared with the church a trial for prayer. Another bout with skin cancer. Not long after, in a season of spiritual conflict, I received an anonymous note in my mailbox. *“Skin cancer is a judgment from the Lord against you. You may die soon as the result of God’s judgment.”* While this note was one of the more blatantly hostile ones I received, I wish I could say that it was the one that hurt the most to receive. It was not.

**May I say something about anonymous notes? If you write a note of criticism or condemnation, please include your name.** Engage with your family in courageous love! Criticisms in themselves are not dark. The elders want you to share your questions and concerns with us!!! Truly!! I have often found such conversations to be incredibly constructive. Please share your name with us if you write notes or letters so we can seek understanding and reconciliation within our family.

*29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?” (2 Corinthians 11:29* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:27)*)*

*S Lewis Johnson: Love without moral indignation is surely not Christian love at all but merely sentimentalism. One only has to read the things that the Lord Jesus said about the Pharisees . . . to understand specifically that Christian love is not love at all if it is not characterized also by moral indignation toward that which is contrary to the truth of God. Moffett in his translation of verse 29, . . . renders it this way. “Whose faith is hurt and I am not aglow with indignation.” So love without moral indignation is not Christian love.*

*32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.” (2 Corinthians 11:32–33* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:32)*)*

**Paul does not list his triumphs as signs that he is from God**. He does not say, “A poisonous snake bit me and I did not even get sick.” Or a demon-filled girl was following me and I had the power to cast out the unclean spirits. Or a sorcerer named Elymas was harassing us and I called God’s judgment down on him and he became blind as a bat. Or I was in prison with Barnabas and the gates of the prison shook wide open to let me out. Or Eutychus fell asleep during one of my long sermons, fell out of the window and died. I went over to him and raised him from the dead!!

Paul does not add these to his credentials! Instead, he said, I barely escaped in a basket down a wall.

**Where does a person’s ministry credentials come from?**

Paul lists his sufferings for Christ as evidence to doubters that he is a true apostle of Christ. False prophets have power. False prophets gather crowds. False prophets preach motivating messages. False prophets perform miracles. False prophets cast out demons. These do not prove authenticity. **Here the authentic mark of a true apostle is a willingness to labor for and to suffer for Jesus.**

**Truth: Only in our weakness will we experience the strength of the LORD.**

**The Confidence of our Father’s Approval: Supreme delight.**

*30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.” (2 Corinthians 11:30–31* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._11:30)*)*

**Why does Paul persevere in ministry?**

“For the love of Christ controls us,” (2 Corinthians 5:14)

**WHERE does Paul find the strength to persevere?**

In the approval from the LORD. Only one opinion matters.

**Illustration: Grandchildren at the park with mom.** Watch me mommy. Watch me. One opinion. Childlike relationship. President. CEO. Famous actor/actress. No matter. Watch me mommy!

Jesus’ parable of the talents in Matthew 25. Five, two and one. “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master!”

*17 “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.” (2 Corinthians 10:17–18* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._10:17)*).*

*“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10* [*ESV*](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#Gal._1:10)*)*

**Our approval from the LORD is not based upon our performance. We are weak and failing. Our approval is based on Jesus’ credentials of righteousness. Paul KNOWS that as long as he remains IN CHRIST, God approves.**

**The false teachers are leading the church away from Jesus. That is disaster!**

**Conclusion:**

**Where are you finding your approval?**

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21 [ESV](https://accordance.bible/link/read/ESVS#2Cor._5:21))