

Requirements for Following Christ (2 Corinthians 11:16-33)

Have you met the requirements for following Christ? You will find out in this passage. To answer his critics and prove the extent of his dedication to Christ, Paul recounts some of his many painful experiences. Although he exposed his critics in the previous passage, he is not finished. He now points out some of the differences between him and the false teachers. In doing so, he gives us a wonderful example of what is required to follow Christ. First ...

Be willing to seem like a fool (11:16-22).

To defend himself against false teachers, he first apologizes for his boasting. He writes, *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* (11:16). Paul doesn't want to boast, but he feels he must refute the accusations of the false teachers at Corinth. He knows his boasting seems foolish because all our talents, skills, and intellects come from God. Paul knows what truth found in Psalm 96:8?

If you really want to give God glory, *bring an offering* to church.

Faced with the constant slander from his critics, Paul is compelled to list some of his credentials. Therefore, he writes, *What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool* (11:17). In other words, *his boastful confidence* is not from the Lord; he is acting like a *fool*. Paul next writes that since the false teachers in Corinth are boasting about their human achievements, *I too will boast* (11:18).

What does Paul sarcastically write in the next verse (11:19)?

In other words, the Corinthians believers think they are wise, but they are listening to *fools*. Wise people don't listen to fools. Spiritual people don't seek advice from people who are not spiritual. To find out if you are wise, do a spiritual inventory of the people from whom you take advice.

Paul continues, *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* (11:20). Whatever the false teachers are teaching is making slaves of the Corinthian believers. The phrase *devours you* means the false teachers are taking everything the Corinthians have. The phrase *takes advantage* is from a Greek verb that describes how hunters capture their prey.

These false teachers are preying on the Corinthians, trying to exploit them for all they are worth. They put on *airs*, or "exalt" themselves above other teachers, including Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Finally, Paul describes the false teachers as someone who *strikes, or slaps, you in the face*. This pictures the most insulting conduct. The false teachers are insulting their intelligence.

If the boldness and boasting of the false teachers are what the Corinthians need, Paul sarcastically writes, *To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of - I am speaking as a fool - I also dare to boast of that* (11:21). Paul knows his boasting makes him sound like a fool. However, he had written earlier to the church at Corinth: *We are fools for Christ's sake* (1 Cor. 4:10a).

Following biblical teachings about morality makes us seem like fools to the world. Regarding the origin of the human race, we seem like *fools*. In the area of marriage, we seem like *fools*. When we give back to God through our tithes and offerings, we seem like *fools*. John the Baptist seemed like a fool when he condemns the immorality of Herod Antipas. It costs him his head (Mt 14:1-11). However, just before John is beheaded, what does Jesus say about him (Matthew 11:11a-b)?

Although Paul feels like a fool doing this, he now presents his apostolic credentials. He writes, *Are they Hebrews? So am I* (11:22a-b). Hebrews were pure-blooded Jews who could speak Hebrew and read the Old Testament in Hebrew. The Greek-speaking Jews, called Hellenists or "Grecians," were considered second-class Jews because they could neither read nor speak Hebrew.

Next, Paul writes, *Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I* (11:22c-f). As an Israelite, Paul could trace his lineage all the way back to Abraham. Boasting about this makes him feel like a fool.

However, the first requirement for following Christ is **be willing to seem like a fool**. Next. ..

Be willing to suffer (11:23-28).

The false teachers in Corinth were enjoying the luxuries of being one of the most prominent and wealthy cities in the Roman Empire. False teachers seem to be drawn to wealthy cities-like Los Angeles, California and Dallas or Houston, Texas. In those cities, the false teachers can live in luxury by exploiting the rich. However, Paul explains two kinds of suffering we must endure to follow Christ: **external** suffering and **internal** suffering.

First is **external** suffering. In contrast to the false teachers, Paul explains he has worked harder, been imprisoned more often, suffered *countless beatings* and often faced death. *Five times he received forty lashes less one* from the Jews (11:23-24).

According to Jewish Law (Deut. 25:3), the maximum number of lashes was forty. The rabbis would only allow thirty-nine lashes, so if the flogger miscounted, he would not accidentally sin by going over forty.

Paul continues recounting his suffering for Christ: *Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned* (11:25a-b). *Rods* refers to Roman punishment. The Jewish form of capital punishment was stoning. When Paul is at Lystra, Jews come from Antioch and Iconium and incite the crowds (Acts 14:19a). As a result, what do we read in Acts 14:19b?

Next, Paul writes: *Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea* (11:25c-d). This doesn't include his last shipwreck while on his voyage to Rome, which had not yet occurred (Acts 27:39-44).

Paul lists other kinds of suffering, such as *danger from rivers and robbers*, as well as from his *own people*, the Jews. He also experienced *danger from Gentiles*, as well as danger in cities, *the wilderness*, and *danger from false brothers* (11:26). He ends his list with danger from false brothers, which has obvious meaning. Since he has bravely faced all these other dangers, he is not afraid of these weak *false brothers*.

Paul continues his resume by recounting other types of suffering he has endured as a *servant of Christ*. What does he list in verse 27?

Paul has gladly endured all these hardships to share the Gospel. However, his critics in Corinth were getting rich and living "high on the hog."

After describing his *external* suffering, Paul writes about his **internal** suffering: *And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches* (11:28). In other words, he has the *daily* burden of his concern for *all the churches* he has founded. One way Paul deals with his *daily pressure, or stress, and anxiety* is constantly praying for the churches. What does he write to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:2)?

Paul is an example of the fact that even the most dedicated Christians experience stress and *anxiety*. At times, everyone has very serious problems. Paul and all the apostles endured daily stress and sometimes overwhelming problems, like he lists in this passage. That's why Peter reminds us to cast all our anxieties on Christ, *because he cares for you* (1 Pet. 5:7).

Requirements for following Christ include: **be willing to seem like a fool, be willing to suffer both externally and internally**, and...

Be willing to empathize (11:29).

False teachers have no real concern or love for their followers. However, Paul explains his empathy for the churches. He writes, *who is weak, and I am not weak?* (11:29a). When others are weak, he is empathetic; he understands and has sympathy for them. What did Paul write earlier to this church (1 Corinthians 12:26a-b)?

Paul continues, *who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?* (11:29). When a believer stumbles into sin, Paul burns with righteous indignation. His anger is not toward the victim of sin, but the source - Satan. However, he never desires condemnation, but rather, restoration (Gal. 6:1).

To follow Christ, **be willing to seem like a fool, be willing to suffer both externally and internally, be willing to empathize**, and ...

Be willing to boast about your weaknesses (11:30-33).

Unlike the false teachers who boast about their strengths, Paul writes, *if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness* (11:30). Paul knows the false teachers at Corinth have made his integrity suspect. Therefore, he writes, *The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying* (11:31). This applies not only to the preceding suffering he has described, but also to his conversion and his experiences when he was a new believer in Christ (Acts 9:1-25; Gal. 1:17, 22- 23).

He specifically writes about *the governor under King Aretas* (air'-uh-tuhs). The Jews in *Damascus* have enlisted the *governor* to help them apprehend Paul. However, when Paul learns of the plot, he escapes by being lowered in a basket through a window in the city wall (11:32-33). Why do the Jews want the governor to arrest Paul, who at this time is still called "Saul" (Acts 9:23b)?

Paul has no bodyguards nor army detail; therefore, in weakness he has to sneak away in the dark. To be followers of Christ, we must be willing to boast about our weakness and how God takes care of us. We are too weak to save ourselves or to live for Christ on our own. Therefore, we can boast about our spiritual *weakness* and how God saves and empowers us. We can also boast about how He rescues us from crisis because we are too weak.

Requirements for following Christ include: **be willing to seem like a fool, be willing to suffer both externally and internally, be willing to empathize, and be willing to boast about your weaknesses.**