

Bragging Rights



Topic

Personal testimony

Theme

A strong personal testimony is a strong defense of the truth.

Desired Learner Response

The learners will lead self-sacrificing lives.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 14

Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 11

Summary

False religious teachers at Corinth rejected Paul's apostolic credentials but bragged about their own credentials. To counter their charges and safeguard the truth, Paul engaged in some bragging of his own. However, he prefaced it with the explanation that he was playing the role of a fool to make his point.

Outline

I. Paul's Life as a Defense (2 Cor. 11:1–12)

- A. Paul's jealous care (11:1–4)
- B. Paul's knowledge (11:5, 6)
- C. Paul's financial integrity (11:7–12)

II. Paul's Case against the Judaizers (2 Cor. 11:13–21)

- A. The Judaizers were false apostles (11:13–15)
- B. Paul's foolish boasting (11:16–18)
- C. The Judaizers were fools (11:19–21)

III. Paul's Testimony as an Apostle (2 Cor. 11:21–33)

- A. Paul's pedigree (11:21, 22)
- B. Paul's trials (11:23–33)

Memory Verse

*"I say again, Let no man think me a fool;
if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me,
that I may boast myself a little"
(2 Corinthians 11:16).*

GETTING STARTED

LESSON 12

Use the following activities to capture your learners' interest in the subject of bragging rights.

Proud Pictures

Give your students a few minutes to show photos from their phone of grandchildren, husband or wife, boyfriend or girlfriend, pets, etc. Tell them that boasting is permitted. Explain that this lesson features some boasting by the apostle Paul.

I Took First Place!

ASK: What bragging rights can you claim? (Q1)

ASK: What did you do to earn those bragging rights? (Q2)

This lesson features some warranted boasting by the apostle Paul.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Second Corinthians 10:1–13:13 forms a unit in which Paul defended himself against his critics. In chapter 10 Paul defended himself against the charges of cowardliness and weakness. In chapter 11 Paul defended himself against the false apostles' allegation that he was not an apostle.

I. Paul's Life as a Defense (2 Cor. 11:1–12)

Paul asked the Corinthians to bear with him while he wrote at some length about himself. He was reluctant to write about himself, and under normal circumstances he considered such a pursuit foolish, but he saw the need to defend his apostleship by appealing to his life and labor. Such personal sharing, he believed, was in the Corinthians' best spiritual interests.

A. Paul's jealous care (11:1–4)

Paul loved the Corinthians, and he was as jealous over them as a father is jealous over his daughter in presenting her as a pure bride to her husband (2 Cor. 11:2). He wanted the Corinthians to esteem their relationship to God as sacred and intimate. He had begotten them through the gospel, and they were his work in the Lord. They were also the seal of his apostleship, and he wanted them to remain pure in their doctrine.

Paul was concerned because he perceived that the Corinthians were in serious danger. They were on the verge of being seduced into unfaithfulness by the false teachers. Just as Satan led Eve astray in the Garden of Eden, so the false teachers sought to corrupt the minds of the Corinthian believers (11:3).

ASK: Why is it important to disciple a new believer soon after his or her salvation? (Q3) *Because Satan wants to keep the new believer from growing and becoming fruitful.*

The false teachers in Corinth were preaching a false gospel about a false Jesus. They tried to persuade the Gentile converts to accept the Jewish system because they believed men and women were saved by faith and by keeping the law of Moses.

Paul called this *another gospel* (11:4). The Greek word means *another of a different kind*. It is indeed so different that it is not a gospel at all. Yet the Corinthians willingly allowed such teaching to persist in their church.

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:3–5. **ASK:** What are the key elements of the gospel? (Q4) *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; He was buried; He arose the third day, according the Scriptures; and He was seen.*

READ: Galatians 1:6–9. **ASK:** How should a believer respond to those who preach a false gospel? (Q5) *The believer should not condone them and should reject them outright.*

B. Paul’s knowledge (11:5, 6)

In 2 Corinthians 11:5 Paul described the false teachers in Corinth as *the very chiefest apostles*. He wasn’t referring to Peter, James, and John but rather to the intruders in the Corinthian church who passed themselves off as men of God. In designating them as super apostles, Paul was employing sarcasm. He insisted that he didn’t lag one bit behind those men.

Paul conceded that he was not a trained orator (11:6). His speech was *rude*; but when he spoke, he knew what he was talking about.

ASK: A smooth-tongued orator usually gets more attention than a clumsy-tongued talker. What do people assume when they hear a smooth-tongued orator? (Q6) *That he or she is educated and an expert.*

READ: 2 Corinthians 11:6. **ASK:** What was one area in which Paul was not lacking? (Q7) *Knowledge.*

ASK: How would Paul counsel a Christian who wants to share his testimony even though he is not an outgoing, gifted communicator? (Q8) *He would probably tell him to go for it, encouraging him by sharing his own experiences.*

Paul had a grasp of the truth. He was an authority on the gospel, because his knowledge had come by revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12). Though Paul’s delivery wasn’t as polished as that of his opponents (for they were smooth-talkers; 1 Cor. 2:1–5), the Corinthians should have recognized that his knowledge of the truth was superior to theirs.

C. Paul’s financial integrity (11:7–12)

READ: 2 Corinthians 11:7–12. **ASK:** From whom did Paul receive financial support when he ministered in Corinth (v. 8)? (Q9) *Other churches.*

Paul’s attackers were teaching the Corinthians that his refusal to accept finan-

cial support from the Corinthians proved that he did not love them. Paul asked in verse 7, *Have I committed an offence in abasing myself?* He provided his own financial support by making tents. A professional orator would have rejected such an arrangement, but Paul was willing to do manual labor so he might extend an opportunity to the Corinthians to trust in Christ. He wanted them to decide whether he had sinned by preaching the gospel without charge. The only correct answer was no.

I robbed other churches, said Paul, to do you service (11:8). The word *robbed* is a military term that means *to take the booty of victorious warfare*. Paul drew his support from churches in areas he had conquered for the gospel before he went to Corinth.

ASK: Why would Paul not ask new believers for money? (Q10) *So he would not appear to be after their money.*

During the early stages of church planting in Corinth, Paul lived hand to mouth (11:9). He gladly surrendered personal comforts for the sake of preaching the gospel to the Corinthians.

Even in those times of need, Paul was not a burden to the Corinthians, because believers from Macedonia (probably from Philippi) came to his aid. He made it his policy not to burden the Corinthian church with his needs (11:9).

ASK: How should a church communicate principles of giving to a new believer without sounding money hungry? (Q11) *Begin with the teaching on stewardship of life, not just money and possessions.*

The false gospel preached by the Judaizers in Corinth provided the Judaizers with a livelihood. This put them at a disadvantage when they attacked Paul, for Paul did not receive any remuneration from the Corinthians. He gloried in being able to preach free of charge in Achaia, and he would not allow anyone to stifle such boasting (11:10).

The false apostles tried to turn Paul's financial policy against him by arguing that he must not have loved the Corinthians. If he loved them, they reasoned, he would have let them support him. Paul answered this charge in verse 11. God knew why he didn't accept financial support from the Corinthian church—and it wasn't because he didn't love them.

In verse 12 Paul explained that his critics wanted him to accept pay from the Corinthian church so they wouldn't look bad. This ruse made Paul more determined than ever to take nothing for himself from the Corinthians. Of course the false teachers could have preached free of charge, as Paul did, but they were not willing to make the sacrifice.

II. Paul's Case against the Judaizers (2 Cor. 11:13–21)

A. The Judaizers were false apostles (11:13–15)

In 2 Corinthians 11:13 Paul called his critics *false apostles* and *deceitful workers*. Although they passed themselves off as apostles of Christ, they were the Devil's emissaries. Satan masterfully makes evil seem good. For example, he portrays excessive drinking and illicit sex as attractive and exciting. Clergymen who deny

the Bible often appear personable, trustworthy, kind, and wise. Indeed, Satan transforms himself into an angel of light and his servants into ministers of righteousness (11:14, 15). But God will judge them both in the end.

ASK: What can a Christian do to make him- or herself distinct from false teachers? (Q12) *Live the truth; refuse to compromise.*

READ: Matthew 7:15; 24:11. **ASK:** How did Jesus describe false prophets? (Q13) *Ravening wolves in sheep's clothing, deceivers.*

B. Paul's foolish boasting (11:16–18)

Although Paul thought it was foolish to boast, circumstances forced him to compare his credentials with those of the false teachers at Corinth. Even if the Corinthians considered him a fool, he asked them to receive him (11:16). The impostors were boasting of themselves, and the Corinthians were receiving them. Paul had decided that the time had come for him to boast also for a little while (11:18). However, he wrote that this type of boasting was not *after the Lord* (11:17). Christ did not send out His apostles to boast. But, since it had become necessary to boast to vindicate the truth, Paul would do so.

C. The Judaizers were fools (11:19–21)

Paul employed irony in pointing out that the Corinthians tolerated fools. After all, they thought they were wise (11:19). He pointed out in verse 20 that the impostors had victimized them.

RESOURCE: Display resource 14. Review what the Judaizers did to the believers in Corinth. Fill in the blank at the bottom of the left panel: Self-serving.

The Tale of Three Testimonies		
False Teachers 1. Corinthians 11:19	Paul 2. Corinthians 11:23–29	Believers Today
1. Enslaved the church.		
2. Used them for financial gain.		
3. Took from them.		
4. Acted as dictators over them.		
5. Humiliated them.		
Self: _____	Self: _____	Self: _____

The Judaizers made the Corinthian believers slaves to the Jewish legal system. The false teachers were devouring the Corinthians by charging exorbitant fees for their teaching. They were getting rich at the Corinthians' expense, and they exalted themselves above the Corinthians. They even struck the Corinthians in the face (11:20), a figure of speech indicating they insulted and humiliated the Corinthians.

If the Corinthians would just stop and look at the false teachers' testimonies, they would realize they could not be from God. They stood in stark contrast to the testimony of Paul's life. Paul said he was too weak to exercise the tyrannical rule (11:20) the Judaizers took over the Corinthian believers (11:21).

III. Paul's Testimony as an Apostle (2 Cor. 11:21–33)

Paul had told the Corinthians that he was going to boast about his apostolic credentials and authority. Beginning at 2 Corinthians 11:21, Paul cited his pedigree.

A. Paul's pedigree (11:21, 22)

The false teachers took great pride in being Hebrews. Paul, too, was a Hebrew. They boasted in being Israelites. Paul, too, was an Israelite. They gloried in being of Abraham's descendants. Paul, too, was a descendant of Abraham. Although these three terms are nearly identical, some commentators see slight differences.

Hebrews were Jews who spoke Aramaic instead of Greek. Israelites stressed their national identity as the Chosen People. And the descendants of Abraham stressed their relationship to the founder of the nation. They were *true-blood Jews* and not proselytes.

B. Paul's trials (11:23–33)

While the false teachers were of Jewish stock, they were not in a class with Paul when it came to trials. He was *more* of a minister of Christ because of what he had to suffer (11:23).

RESOURCE: Display resource 14. **READ:** 2 Corinthians 11:23–28. **ASK:** What trials had Paul endured as an apostle? (Q14) (Record some of the trials on the resource.) *Exhausting toil; lashings; imprisonment; life-threatening situations; beatings; stoning; ship-wrecks; adrift at sea; frequent travel; risk of drowning; risk of being robbed; risk of being assaulted or killed by the Jews or by Gentiles; at risk in desolate places and on the high seas; at risk among false brethren; weariness; pain; sleeplessness; hunger; thirst; food deprivations; cold; nakedness; the care of the churches.*

ASK: Which trial do you think was the hardest to endure? Why? (Q15)

RESOURCE: Fill in the blank at the bottom of the middle column on resource 14: Self-sacrifice.

ASK: If Paul's job were open, would you apply for it? Why or why not? (Q16)

Trials had dogged Paul's steps from his earliest days as Christ's servant, when foes attempted to assassinate him in Damascus (11:32). On that occasion, as on all subsequent occasions, the Lord watched over him (11:33).

The false apostles wanted a rich, easy, rewarding life. But Christ called His apostles to a life fraught with danger and persecution. Paul's life was in line with that of the other true apostles (cf. Peter and John [Acts 4] and James [Acts 12:2]). His willingness to endure harsh trials for the sake of the gospel proved that God had called him to be an apostle.

ASK: Why does enduring hardships for Christ strengthen a person's testimony as nothing else can? (Q17) *It shows deep conviction and commitment that authenticate the reality of Christ in the believer.*

RESOURCE: Display resource 14. **ASK:** What can believers do today to ensure a good testimony? (Q18) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *Guard their lips, live with convictions, and stand for the truth.*

RESOURCE: Write a question mark in the blank at the bottom of the right panel of resource 14. Emphasize that the world is watching our every move and hearing our every word. A self-sacrificing testimony is vital when it comes to effectively presenting the truth.

The Tale of Three Testimonies		
False Teachers 2 Corinthians 11:20	Paul 2 Corinthians 11:23–29	Believers Today
1. Enslaved the church.		
2. Used them for financial gain.		
3. Took from them.		
4. Acted as dictators over them.		
5. Humiliated them.		
Self: _____	Self: _____	Self: _____

The Tale of Three Testimonies		
False Teachers 2 Corinthians 11:20	Paul 2 Corinthians 11:23–29	Believers Today
1. Enslaved the church.		
2. Used them for financial gain.		
3. Took from them.		
4. Acted as dictators over them.		
5. Humiliated them.		
Self: _____	Self: _____	Self: _____

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to challenge your learners to live self-sacrificing lives that reflect the truth.

Growing Stronger in the Lord

READ: 2 Timothy 2:4–7. **ASK:** How well does Paul’s testimony match your testimony? (Encourage your learners to put a checkmark next to the appropriate description under question 19 in the study book.)

ASK: How might you strengthen your faith and Christian service so you will be able to echo Paul’s testimony at the end of your life? (Q20)

Let Me Tell You . . .

ASK: With whom will you share your testimony this week? (Q21)

Bearing One Another’s Burdens

Encourage your learners to talk about persecution and other trials they are experiencing because of their stand for Christ. Organize the learners into prayer groups, and instruct learners to pray for one another as they encounter such trials.

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: By God’s grace I can lead a self-sacrificing life.

Encourage your learners to memorize 2 Corinthians 11:16. Give them an opportunity to quote the verses in class next week.

Waves of Grace	
By God's grace I can ...	7.
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.