

Text: 2 Cor 11.1-33**2 Corinthians:**

Opening (1.1-11)

Addressing Corinthian Perceptions and Paul's Ministry Philosophy (1.12-7.16)

Defending Paul's Conduct (1.12-2.17)

Exposition of Paul's Philosophy (3.1-6.10)

Appeal for Corinthian confidence (6.11-7.16)

Instructions concerning the offering (8.1-9.15)

Assertion of apostolic authority (10.1-13.10)

Conclusion (13.11-14)¹

In the concluding section of 2 Corinthians Paul changes his tone.

In part 1, he carefully reasons out his defense.

In part 2, he reminds them diplomatically.

In part 3, he strongly asserts his authority.

"Some writers refer to 11:1–12:13 as Paul's 'Fool's Speech' because of the recurring foolishness terminology in this passage (*aphrosyne*, *aphron*, *paraphron*; cf. 11:1, 16 [twice], 17, 19, 23; 12:11, 16)."²

I. The "Fool's Speech" opens (1-6)

What does Paul mean when he requests that they bear with a little foolishness, then insists they are indeed bearing with him? (1)

He is warning them that he intends to speak about himself, a thing he considers foolish. Since they are reading the letter, they will have to bear with it.

"As much against the grain as it is with a proud man to acknowledge his infirmities, so much is it against the grain with a humble man to speak in his own praise."³

¹ Adapted from Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003).

² Constable, 2 Cor 11.1.

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 2290.

Three reasons for making the “Fool’s Speech” follow in vv. 2-6.

1. (2) He is jealous for them as if as the father of a virgin bride
2. (3-4) He is afraid they will be deceived and drawn away from the truth
3. (5) He considers himself the equal of any so-called apostles (or real apostles) they respected

What might have “the most eminent apostles” said about Paul? How did he counter the charge? (6)

They criticized Paul’s speech; Paul says even if true, he is skilled in knowledge, which they well know

II. Paul’s financial policy defended (7-15)

Paul’s policy of self-support was also criticized in some way by the false apostles. They may have said that Paul is closer to other churches since he accepts money from them. He indignantly defends his policy. How would we describe his practice, and what is his tone? (7-9)

Paul supported himself by his tent-making and from gifts from other churches; he made no charges to churches while he was working among them. His tone is sarcastic.

What does Paul insist on in v. 10?

His policy will not change

In v. 11, Paul may point to the criticism of the false apostles. What does he insist here?

That he does indeed love the Corinthians, appealing to God’s knowledge of his heart

In vv. 12-15, Paul takes the gloves off and goes after the false apostles with no mincing words. He wants to cut off every criticism (12) and strongly describes the men who are attacking him. What does he call them and to whom does he compare them?

He calls them false apostles and servants of Satan, comparing them to Satan’s deceitful appearances

III. The "Fool's Speech" proper (16-33)

Paul reiterates his intention to speak foolishly (16-17). What is his reason for speaking this way? (18-19)

The false apostles were setting themselves up by boasting of themselves and the Corinthians are accepting their claims

In sarcasm, Paul describes their toleration bluntly. They tolerate those who do spiritual harm to them. (20) How does Paul compare himself to their approach? (21a)

He is weak at harming them

He now lays out his credentials (speaking in foolishness, as he sees boasting as improper). What credentials does he lay out in v. 22?

His Jewishness, which is the equal of his critics who must have boasted about their background

In a lengthy section, he describes how his service to Christ is far more than anything these false apostles could boast of. What is he saying by making this comparison? (23-27)

He is not merely the equal of the false apostles, but superior to them

And what is his most significant ground of boasting? (28-29)

His care of the churches, where he labours for the benefit of the weakest members of his churches

Paul then proposes to boast in his weaknesses, where he had to entirely depend on God. He again appeals to God's knowledge of his truthfulness. What does this appeal refer to? (30-31)

Probably to all the claims he makes in these chapters (including ch. 12)

Why does Paul go back to one of his earliest experiences of suffering in vv. 32-33?

He wants to show his dependence on God from the beginning and the fact that the Lord delivered him — proof of God's approval on his ministry

“In many of his examples Paul presented himself as one who did not fit the pattern of successful ministers of the gospel. Like the Corinthians, we modern Christians tend to evaluate a person’s success on the basis of the world’s standards. Rather than playing down the events in his ministry that made him look inferior, Paul emphasized them, because they glorified God and His remarkably sufficient grace. In view of all of Paul’s calamities, there is no way that he could have been so effective unless God was with him.”⁴

⁴ Constable, *Expository Notes*, 2 Cor 11.32.