

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!

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 laboured 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 for ever, 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.

In 2005 Jane & I moved to South Africa from Egypt, we were going to import the treasures of Egypt, our showroom was going to be a derelict barn on a small holding we took all the resources we had and family helped and we renovated the barn into a home for ourselves and a gallery for our products. It wasn't spectacular but we had put our best into it. Then unexpectedly came the announcement that despite having a good relationship with and agreement with the owner, he was going to be selling the whole plot. The floor on which we had bloodied our knees polishing and techniquing was being taken away, the barn that our money had turned from a ramshackle tool shed and garage into beautiful showroom was being taken away. We went into arbitration but the other party refused to be bound. It was an evening and Jurie the arbitrator had just come to the barn to tell us that his final attempt to convince the landlord to arrive at a reasonable settlement had failed. With a heavy heart I was seeing Jurie to his car when I bumped into the owner, in frustration and anger at the injustice and I vented, verbally.

Ever since I remember reading this passage I have struggled to come to terms with what on earth is Paul doing as he stoops to the level of those he is opposing. Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, a man whose life is a pattern of spiritual excellence, who said imitate me because I'm imitating Jesus. This is he who whilst on a dusty track somewhere close to Damascus, the glorified risen Jesus singled out for a post resurrection appearance. A man who wrote 50% of the NT, had an out of body experience of paradise, saw people raised from the dead. After Jesus, he was the most influential Christian to have lived, to the extent that 2 millennia later we are reading and re-reading his mail. He is the man, a spiritual giant.

Yet here he is boasting, sarcastic and ironic. In a moment of self righteousness I was questioning whether I had ever felt so provoked that I had lost the plot like Paul did, I'm not talking an angry rant at your spouse, friend, brother, dog, sister, errant driver, boss. I'm talking about where the opinion of the onlooker became irrelevant, those around irrelevant, where you load that canon, the fuse is lit and boom, you let them have it. Yes I have, I remembered my barnyard encounter with the owner of our barn. Our barn so hard-won, something so financially, physically, emotionally valuable was being torn away. And it is in the context of that process of losing something that I think I intersect with what Paul is going through. It's the heart of the father as he watches the prodigal pack his bags believing he knows what is best. It's a rejected parent to a child, blind to subversive influence of a friend. It's the home-owners watching as the bank repossesses their home. It is a hurt-hearted bared.

He is being real, very real. To Paul, Jesus and His bride the church was everything. The external had come to mean nothing to him, his own life had value purely because it could be spent being a father to the churches. And the Corinthian church was a young child being lured away to destruction. Well might the parent abandon decorum and rant. Paul declares earlier in the chapter, 'I am jealous for you. With a godly jealousy'

I say abandon decorum and rant but Paul isn't ranting an anger induced 120 character tweet, composed and sent in seconds and regretted for a lifetime. He is dictating to a scribe, the ink into which he dips his reed nib is soot mixed with gum & water, he is writing on animal skin. What I'm getting at is this; the tools employed make for a slow, considered process. Think of Treebeard of Fangorn forrest, There is nothing like doing something in a slow and considered manner to cause anger-heated blood to cool.

Get me angry and you'll get far more heat than light, but despite the intense emotion that is motivating Paul, there is far more light than heat and this becomes apparent on closer inspection.

In this group of verses, Paul measures himself with the so-called super Apostles, we'll call them Fakes on three levels. 1. **Their use of authority :19-21** 2. **Their Hebrew credentials :21-22** 3. **Their service of Christ :22-29.** (put in PP)

Firstly their **use of authority**

:19 you gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! (Oh the sarcasm!) : in fact you even put up with any who enslave you or exploit you or take advantage of you or push themselves forward or slap you in the face. :21 And in mock remorse he says, 'To my shame we were too weak for that'.

Measured against the Fakes abilities to abuse authority Paul readily agrees, the Fakes excel. Do you remember the story where in a less than subtle bid for power James and John, being macho men that they were, send mummy to secure positions of honour for them and the subsequent jostling and testosterone induced chest beating among the disciples, Jesus gathers his posse around him and says,

"You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage." Matt 20:25 The Message Bible (pp)

The Fakes threw their weight around and trampled on the people and extorted money, Paul was like Jesus, a servant. He laboured among them for free, staying with his tent-making friends Aquila & Priscilla, relying on his tent sales and a church in Macedonia to support him. Paul didn't dispute the right of Xn workers to be paid for their work in fact he taught it most emphatically. But the Fakes weren't being paid, they were extorting the Corinthians, they were sharks. These Fakes didn't see the Corinthians as sheep to be shepherded, they were bleeding them financially dry!

The Corinthians allowed themselves to be 'slapped in the face'. Why might someone slap you? I figure it is to chastise and/or humiliate. The slaps I received in the cafeteria from Wilky the bully, were pure humiliation. Why did I not respond? Fear on some level. Why did the Corinthians not respond to being slapped? I gave the scenario to a counsellor. She explained that after basic needs of food, water and shelter are sorted, we then strive to belong and having achieved that sense of belonging, be that within a social group, a relationship, a gang, the local church, our tolerance levels go up fearing rejection, we put up with stuff. Like Wilky the bully, he was at the core of my friendship group, I was on the edges, challenge him, I might lose the whole group. Rather take the slaps and continue to belong.

We can also put up with abusive leadership because we have the wrong idea that the apostle/pastor/teacher/prophet whatever title we give them has a relationship with God that I am not capable of. The leader doesn't have a monopoly on truth. I don't have exclusive access to the truth zone, neither does anybody else that teaches from this spot. We all have access.

There was a group of people from a town called Berea where Paul had been preaching and he holds them up as the benchmark. The attitude of the Bereans was, 'wow Paul, great preach, loved what you said, I'm feeling inspired and motivated, but I'm off home now to check out what you said, see if it's true.' And for that reason Paul calls them, 'noble' because they searched and examined the bible daily, to make sure Paul was on track. As opposed to the Corinthians who were wowed by the image and slick presentation of the fake apostles and hadn't taken the time to feed themselves spiritually, for this reason Paul calls them Babies, not even children, because they didn't take the study of the bible seriously, they didn't chew on it for themselves, which would have resulted in them collectively saying, no we aren't giving you any money and we don't want you to teach anymore because we don't agree with your teaching, and this is why, see it says here...

So when it comes to comparing himself to the false apostles authority, he readily admits you win, I couldn't abuse you like they did.

Then Paul measures himself against their Jewish credentials.

:22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I!

it appears that the Fake apostles were Jewish and were throwing their Jewishness around as a status deal. The first followers of Jesus were all Jewish, and some had begun to place a premium on this. Now Paul claims he is boasting; boasting is about puffing yourself up trying to impress, 'to speak with exaggeration and excessive pride, especially about oneself.' What is surprising here is less what Paul says than what he doesn't, elsewhere he is far more detailed about his Jewishness, but not here. Paul holds a trump card that trump card is Gamaliel.

Gamaliel holds a reputation for being one of the greatest teachers in all of Judaism and Paul was quite possibly the only private student he ever had. That's the royal flush that wins the pot. But he doesn't play it. Why? Because his point isn't to show the Corinthian church that he is more Jewish but rather to show that these Fake apostles who are bigging up their Jewish family tree are just the same as Paul. Paul is in effect asking them, hey, if it's true that Jews are special, why didn't you elevate me, why didn't I elevate myself?

Paul has highlighted the abuse the Corinthians are taking from these fake apostles and now he is confronting the error that the Fake apostles are promoting which is, 'if you are a follower of Jesus that is great but if you are a follower of Jesus AND Jewish, well that is premier league. What does the bible say about that? In the gospel of Matthew, where Jews are claiming special privilege because they are Sons of Abraham, it says 'God is able to raise children of Abraham from these stones!' ie there is no favouritism in the Kingdom of God, there is no fast-track, there is no A list. Paul deals with this head on a few pages later in Galatians 3:27-29 '

In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous "descendant," heirs according to the covenant promises.

You want to know who God's favourite is? You are! You are not in his general field of vision, his eye is on you, you are the *focus* of his love and attention he wants you to receive that love and attention. If you haven't acknowledged that or don't understand it, please speak to me or someone here that you feel comfortable with. But I want to tell you; today is the day to respond to Jesus.

What is beginning to become clear is, Paul isn't boasting as we understand boasting. It's a bit like when Jane and I are going out and she puts on her heels and announces that she is now taller than me, no you're not, yes I am, no you're not, yes I am and she comes and stands back to back to learn what we already knew, that I am taller. Paul the apostle, without any effort, is head and shoulders above these Fake apostles.

Their service of Christ :22-29

The third point is, are they servants of Christ? Paul could have pointed to the number of people he had lead to Jesus, the number of churches he had planted. Does the name Eutychus ring any bells? He was the patron saint of church snoozers! Paul was preaching, Eutychus had a comfortable window seat, a little too comfortable, fell asleep, and fell out of the window and died. Paul prayed for him & he returned to life. Paul doesn't mention that! He doesn't mention the healings that took place when the material that he wrapped around his head and the apron he wore as he laboured were laid on the sick and they recovered. Perhaps one reason for not saying all this is that the people who were challenging Paul and his authority weren't some random teachers who's theology had gone a little sketchy. They were, in Paul's words, 'Servants of Satan'. And as such they weren't strangers to the miraculous or spectacular, but Servants of Satan have no taste for suffering, hunger, imprisonment, beating, loneliness, abandonment.

Lets take a closer look at how Paul describes himself. :23 ***In prison more frequently***. Up to this point we only know of one imprisonment, when he and Silas were in prison, but here we learn that wasn't the only time.

:24 ***forty lashes minus 1***. In Roman law/tradition 40 lashes was the equivalent to a death penalty, the flogger was able to kill the criminal with 40 lashes, if they did not they were liable to death themselves having been judged to have been too lenient. So 39 lashes were given to those whose crime was serious but not deserving of death and so a flogger would just about leave life in a person. Many have seen such a flogging scene in the Passion of the Christ. Paul endured that five times. :25 ***pelted with stones***. In Lystra a mob surrounded Paul and pelted him with stones till he lost consciousness and fell to the ground. He was then dragged out of the city & left for dead. '***Three times I was shipwrecked***' there's only one record of him being ship-wrecked and that's in Acts 27 but all of this is before Acts 27 events, so that's 4 shipwrecks.

Scenario - Outreach in the Mediterranean, leader - Paul the Apostle, would you sign up? There is something in me and you that strongly desire to experience God do the impossible. When we recount our notable experiences of God we recount what has happened when I or someone else was out on a limb, at the end of myself, financially depleted, physically depleted, intellectually defeated. We pursue a secure existence and yet it is when our security is threatened or gone, we experience the depths of God. We seek to make ourselves strong, but God's power is most effective in my weakness.

:28 ***Besides everything else, I face daily the inescapable pressure of my concern for all the churches***. Here is the generator of all the emotion; Paul's love for the churches. Not love in some abstract pop star way, but in an intense emotionally connected continual way. He sees his child the church in Corinth being seduced and molested, and he burns.

In summary, Paul sees that which he loves dearly, the church in Corinth into which he has given so much of himself, he sees it being enticed away seduced and he confronts their gullibility with irony, 'I was too weak to

exploit you', he confronts their prejudicial elevation of Jews with a, 'yes I'm Jewish what was so special about me'?.. and he confronts their hero worship of the Fake apostles with his scars and sufferings for Jesus.

Let's not pursue Power lets pursue servant hood, lets pursue vulnerability, and embrace weakness.