

What 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 stoned, 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 own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27 I have labored 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.

I Am More Because Jesus is Most

Kevin McHale and Larry Bird didn’t really look like they would be good basketball players. McHale looked more like an accountant. Bird looked like a farm boy. But when they got out on the court, forget about aesthetics. They were MORE than that. You could see just what great ball players they actually were. If someone told me, “Larry Bird was awful,” I would probably have a conversation with them. I would pull out the tape and say, “Look again.” Sometimes we get defensive about our sports heroes when someone says they stink.

The same thing would ring true of Paul. If you read between the lines of his letter to 2 Corinthians, he wasn’t a very impressive looking man. Imagine having been on the road for months on end, having been through what he went through. He was whipped five times, beaten with rods three times, and nearly stoned to death. You’ve seen pictures of slaves who were whipped on the internet? That’s what Paul’s back probably looked like. I would envision him looking like an emaciated and beaten man. He himself spoke about having a thorn in his flesh that he couldn’t get rid of. Some think it may have been bad eyesight. Others think it was a stutter. But that didn’t mean he was a loser. He was much MORE than that.

There were these guys who called themselves the “super-apostles.” They must have been very impressive looking men. They would have been strong speakers: very confident. Paul said that the Corinthians gladly put up with people who were enslaving them and slapping them in the face. So it would appear that these men had come into Corinth and were being spiritually abusive within the congregation. They were claiming to have higher authority than the Corinthians, and they were ridiculing Paul in the process. They may have said something like,

His letters - yes - they seem forceful enough. But you’ve heard him speak. You’ve seen him. He doesn’t have a strong voice. He comes limping in here. He has no power to him, and he doesn’t do anything to enforce the law with you. You guys are a bunch of misfits, because Paul is too lenient. Listen to us. We will tell you how to live. We have true authority. We are more authoritative than Paul. He may have brought you to faith, but we can take you much further than him. He’s nothing

compared to us. He doesn't even charge for his services. He's desperate. You need better than him. You need us!

They tried to build themselves up in the sight of the Corinthians by tearing down Paul and more or less calling him a loser, and the Corinthians didn't come to his defense!

Imagine that, if you had a very strong and confident man who came in here and said, "I am a super-pastor. I will be much better than Pastor Starr. I will do ten times more than Pastor Pankow. You guys are a bunch of losers right now, but I can get your church to grow leaps and bounds. You'll be better and stronger if you just follow me. Dump them, and I'll tell you what to do. But it's going to cost you. You can't get these kinds of services for free." How would we respond if you started listening to them?

It can happen in marriage or a relationship where there are difficulties. Another man or woman can come swooping in, ridicule the spouse or significant other, and brag about he or she will be so much better. It can happen when trying to go for a promotion or a job. People lie on their resumes and try to put on a persona before the boss that is a false representation of who they really are. If someone is constantly tearing down your parents or a former boyfriend or spouse and talking about how much better they will be, I would be very leery. They are only tearing down others to build themselves up. The 8th Commandment tells us not to bear false witness against others. Even if something is true it doesn't always need to be said. What good does it do to point out others weaknesses? Proverbs 27:2 says, "**Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth.**"

Paul had weaknesses, there was no doubt about it. But for these super-apostles to claim that Paul was weak and they were better - in order to try and steal the love and devotion of the Corinthians? Paul would have none of it. He was much MORE than that. He was forced to talk about HIMSELF, the last thing that he really wanted to do. He compared it to being driven to a temporary type of insanity. It is against the very nature of Christians, who are well aware of their own sinfulness to brag about themselves. We have a great sense of worthlessness because of what the Law and the Bible does to us - by pointing out the sins we commit and the sinners we are. We know that even our greatest works are like filthy rags. We by very nature confess our sins and would only want to cling to JESUS and HIS sacrifice on the cross for our righteousness and forgiveness. We would much rather talk about Jesus than about ourselves.

But the devil wants you to focus on all that your spouse doesn't do in order to bring about divorce. He loves it when children paint their parents out to be the worst parents in the world so that they lose respect. He loves it when you go to work and just get angry because nobody else does anything so that you become arrogant and full of anger. He loves you to focus on other people's weaknesses and faults, especially if it can make you feel better about yourself and put you in a better light, so that you'll be filled with PRIDE instead of HUMILITY.

So Paul had to defend himself in order to defend the Gospel. He basically said, "You really want to play this game? This is who I am. I am a Jew of Jews. This is what I've gone through. I go through the daily stress of caring for your souls. I am MORE than the superapostles." It should have been obvious to everyone that Paul had made more sacrifices than any of those superapostles, and he was integral to the foundation of their church in the first place. The superapostles didn't get beaten or stoned. They didn't go through shipwrecks. They didn't establish any churches. Yet they wanted to come in and act like they had built the church from scratch. The Corinthians KNEW this, but they didn't defend Paul! They were so enamored with these spiritual bullies that they didn't even seem to realize what they were allowing to happen to them.

When your children start complaining about what you don't do for them: how abused they are: sometimes you have to go through a diatribe. In our house it's called the "excuse me" speech. "Excuse me?!?" When the kids hear those words, they know they've stepped over the line. Sometimes your own spouse needs to be reminded of what you do when they make accusations about how unloving or uncaring you are or how you don't do anything. Sometimes you need to defend yourself to your boss when you're being accused of being lazy or not doing the job properly. It's embarrassing in some ways, but if your authority or your love or your trustworthiness is being questioned and attacked, sometimes you have to defend yourselves. "I am more." If you don't, the devil will cause problems real quick. Sometimes you need to defend others too.

But more often than not we are the ones who are in the shoes of the super-apostles - pointing the finger at others for what we think they should be doing. We like to think of ourselves as the martyrs who do everything while everyone else does nothing. We sometimes get angry about doing our duties like Jonah did. When people don't respond with thanksgiving we get like James and John and want to call the fire of hell down on them. It can come from an unhealthy focus on other people's failures and a self righteous anger.

Think about it. Do your parents yell at you once in a while? Make you do chores? I bet they haven't beaten you with whips yet. If they have, let me know. Do you have pressure at work? Are you afraid of not making quota and getting fired? How about having the pressure of someone's soul ending up in hell over some false prophets coming in? We like to martyr ourselves, but none of us compare to what Paul went through. He is more.

And we have to remember why Paul went through so many sacrifices. He did it because of the greatest sacrifice and the greatest news any of us could ever receive - that Jesus died for our sins and won heaven for us. Talk about sacrifices; Jesus didn't live a lavish life when He came here. He didn't even have a place to call his own. He willingly went to the place of torture to save us from hell and earn heaven for us free of charge so we could be saved by faith, through baptism. Paul knew that he had been called to spread this message, and if he didn't risk his life and make sacrifices to go on his mission trips, the message wouldn't reach the ears of the people and they would end up in hell. He was willing to make sacrifices so that they heard the message. We hear this message too through the words of Paul! Jesus died for us too! His is the greatest sacrifice of all - for all of us! He is most!

Jesus reminds us that following Him takes sacrifice. He never said it would be easy. We forget that. We want life to be easy, and we CAN be lazy. Spiritually, how much time are you willing to put in to say prayers with your children and for your children? How difficult do you imagine it to be to come to worship on a Sunday morning for one hour a week or go to Bible class? How much time do you put into pro-actively doing things for your family or place of work that WEREN'T asked of you? Could you be more and make more sacrifices for others in you life? Don't give them real reasons to point the finger.

As you make these sacrifices, you will fail. You will see your own laziness and sin. So please, don't forget the work that Jesus went through for your salvation and why He did it. He didn't do it to make you feel guilty. He wanted to sacrifice Himself for you so that you would look holy and forgiven in His sight. And through faith in Jesus, with all of your laziness and sin, you are still forgiven and precious in God's sight. There is no "have to" for you in salvation. Jesus did it all. You are not saved by YOUR hard work or lack of work. You are saved

by Jesus' work. Nothing more. Nothing less. No demands. Just forgiveness and salvation. Just don't forget that. Think about it every day. You're forgiven for all of your failures as a child, as a spouse, as an employee, as a church member. You're forgiven. Think about it also for those who let you down with their own laziness and sin, before you decide to call the fire of hell down on them.

This past week I was able to do a day trip out to Ludington Beach. It was a two and a half hour drive and ended up being about a four hour float down a river. Unfortunately, the tubes barely were moving, so we took turns getting out and pulling the tubes down the river. By the time we got done I was exhausted and sun burnt. I see other people do so much more for their families and I feel guilty for my lack of effort that I spend with them. I think about taking one day to do something with my family, and then compare that to what Paul spent years doing for Jesus - by going on at least three missionary journeys - spending days and night on the road - getting beaten and imprisoned. How weak I am compared to him!

We all have weaknesses. We are all sinful. But Jesus died for weak sinners like us. The way the kingdom grows is not by getting in a competition about who is better than the other. If other people are better at some things than we are, God bless them! Let them do their work well. Instead of trying to tear each other down and build ourselves up, humbly make your own weak sacrifices for the good of the kingdom. Life is full of crosses and difficult jobs that we don't really want to do sometimes. It's full of people that don't think you do anything, and so they do less. Defend yourself if you need to. Be willing to make sacrifices too, show people how much MORE you can be. Appreciate the sacrifices that people make for you, in light of the greatest sacrifice and the only sacrifice that saves: the sacrifice of Christ on the cross; the MOST important sacrifice of all. Amen.