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# 2 Corinthians

**...in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 2 Corinthians 11:27**

Paul provides several more specifics concerning the difficulties he had faced for the sake of sharing the gospel message. This list begins with "...in weariness and toil." He gives this same general sentiment, using the same two Greek words, when writing to those in Thessalonica -

"...nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you." 2 Thessalonians 3:8

These words probably refer to his personal skill as a tent maker. In working with his own hands, he labored long hours in order to provide the gospel free to those he preached to.

The "sleeplessness often" was probably as much for fear of being attacked as for anything else. He was constantly under threat by those around him and he probably slept with one eye open in order to make sure he wasn't pounced upon by one of them.

"In hunger and thirst" certainly came as he traveled around searching for the next person to speak to about Christ. He was less worried about finding a tavern to eat in and more worried about finding a soul to feed the gospel to.

"In fastings often" describes his self-denial in order to come nearer to God in prayer. Fasting is mentioned in Acts 13:2, 3 and is something that he would be used to as a Pharisee. Jesus noted the fastings of the Pharisees on several occasions.

"In cold and nakedness" describes a state which he probably faced almost continuously during the winter months. He would have slept outside often as he traveled, and he may have not had a fire to keep himself warm as he did. His clothes were probably not sufficient to keep him warm. Instead, he would have been more concerned about them being light rather than bulky in order to make traveling easier.

The words Paul uses to describe himself here very closely match the sufferings of his father of the past, Jacob. When Jacob lived in Padan Aram, he tended to his uncle's flocks. During that time, he suffered just as his descendant Paul would suffer for a different type of Gentile flock. That is recorded in Genesis 31 -

"Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me?<sup>37</sup> Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both!<sup>38</sup> These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock.<sup>39</sup> That which was torn *by beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night.<sup>40</sup> *There* I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes.<sup>41</sup> Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times." Genesis 31:36-41

Life application: Inconvenience such as Paul faced is something many of us have never known. However, there are missionaries around the world who have given up on a life of ease in order to share the message of Christ in places where any and all of the hardships that Paul describes are not uncommon. Take time to today

to lift those weary souls up in prayer. And be willing to honor them through letters, gifts, and support if at all possible.

**...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 2 Corinthians 11:28**

Paul has listed many things which have come against him during his evangelistic efforts. He has noted trials, punishments, and perils. In concluding this list, he says, "...besides the other things." The word used here is only found in the NT and only three times. Therefore, its meaning is debated. It can mean "trials which come to me externally," or it can mean "other things which I haven't mentioned." The latter is probably correct.

He has given a long list of trials and yet it is not a full and complete list. He has simply highlighted some of the events which he has faced. Along with those many external trials, he also faced, as he says, "...what comes upon me daily." The phrase here has a much stronger force in the Greek. The word indicates "that which rushes upon me." It is like an overwhelming tide. Specifically, he says it is "my deep concern for all the churches."

Paul carried with him the constant concern for those he had led to Christ. He wrote them letters, prayed for them, and carried the burden of their staying close to Christ or departing onto a wayward path. The mental pressures he faced were probably even more debilitating than the physical trials. These mental pressures rushed upon him as if an unstoppable tide at times as he struggled in his heart for his beloved children in the faith.

The Bible scholar Farrar remarks on verses 23-28 saying that it is "the most marvelous record ever written of any biography; a fragment beside which the most imperiled lives of the most suffering saints shrink into insignificance, and which shows us how fractional at the best is our knowledge of the details of St. Paul's life."

Life application: Do you carry the burden in your heart for those who have come to Christ in your life, but have then fallen away? Do you have a desire to see the immature in the faith grow into maturity? Such things should be at the forefront of our hearts and prayers as we bring these burdens to God. Remember those around you as you speak to Him, lifting them up along with all of the other physical needs of others that are so commonly prayed for.

**Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? 2 Corinthians 11:29**

From verses 22-27, Paul spoke of those physical things which pertained to him which were in comparison to the false apostles he has been referring to. He was showing the Corinthians that if they could adore the false apostles for their attributes, then he had that much more of all of those attributes to which they could attach their adoration to. This was done, of course, in a manner not intending for them to idolize him, but to show them that they were misdirected in their attitude of elevating man in the way they had.

In verse 28, Paul went from the external to the internal with the words, "besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." His concern for the churches and all of the mental trials were also a part of his efforts for the churches he ministered to. Continuing on now with the inward things with which he struggled, he asks, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?"

This is a verse concerning his empathy for the trials that those in the church face. He was showing them that he was just like them. They had weaknesses and he too faced his own weaknesses. However, he not only faced his own weaknesses, but he also empathized in their weaknesses with them. To understand this, we can first go to 1 Corinthians 8:13 where he says, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

Paul understood that there were those who were weak in the faith over certain issues. If their weakness demanded that he become like them in order to keep them from stumbling, then he would do so. This is then confirmed in his actions that are noted in 1 Corinthians 9:22 with the words, "...to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some."

Following this, he next asks, "Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?" Again, he shows his empathy for their situation as believers still trapped in this weakened body of flesh. There are two general views on how this verse is to be interpreted. One is purely of empathy, and one is of indignation over the offense. In other words, is the word "burn" pertaining to his own internal lusts which he struggles with (empathy with those who face the same), or is the word used concerning his indignation over their weakness?

The word for "burn" is only used one other time in a non-literal sense. In 1 Corinthians 7:9, it says -

"For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*." 1 Corinthians 7:9.

What seems more than probable is that Paul is using it in this same manner when applied to himself. Thus, this is a verse of empathy, not of indignation. First, it is in line with the previous example of being weak, and secondly, it conforms to the next verse which speaks of "the things which concern my infirmity."

It is unlikely that Paul would show indignation at another's weakness and then boast in his own frailties. This doesn't mean that Paul didn't burn with indignation at his own stumbling, or at the stumbling of others, but that he really faced such things as a human being.

However, it appears that many scholars are afraid to admit that Paul actually burned with passions, as if admitting this would somehow diminish him in his

ministry. But... this is exactly what he is trying to do. He is trying to get people's eyes off of the flesh and onto the strength of Christ which is more powerful than our weakness.

Charles Ellicott is one of the few who is willing to accept that this is the proper way of interpreting this verse. He says -

"Men came to the Apostle with their tales of shame, and told how they had been tempted and had fallen; and here, too, he, in that illimitable sympathy of his, seemed to have travelled with them on the downward road. He felt himself suffused, as it were, with the burning glow of their shame. He blushed with them and for them, as though the sin had been his own."

Life application: Anyone (even your favorite pastor or preacher) burns inwardly in one way or another. Don't think that anyone is above this. If you face weaknesses and they claim that they don't, you might start looking for a new church without such an arrogant soul making claims which are simply not true. If he cannot empathize with you, then he might be prone to lording his supposed superiority over you!

**If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.**

2 Corinthians 11:30

Paul has established that of all the things the false apostles had boasted in, he had more reason to boast. What they were, he was also, and even more. After demonstrating to the Corinthians that he was eminently qualified to boast in such things, he then wrote about his weakness and that he was one who stumbled. From that thought, he now adds on the words of this verse, "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity."

In other words, the previous boastings were done in an ironical and sarcastic manner. He didn't really boast in those fleshly things at all, but instead named them to show that what the Corinthians thought to be important was, in fact,

unimportant. Now, he will begin to show the things that he could truly boast in; "the things which concern my infirmity."

In this, he is showing that the very things which are considered weak, unappealing, useless, etc. are those things which are greater than the supposed greatest boastings of the false apostles. It is nicely reflected in his previous words to them in his first epistle -

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.<sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,<sup>29</sup> that no flesh should glory in His presence." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

These things are well summed up in his coming words of chapter 12 verse 9 which say, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Life application: Those things which seem contemptible in the eyes of the false apostles are the things we might have reason to boast in the most. The Lord is looking on the internals. If they are sound, then all of the outward flash is seen to be useless, even harmful, in our walk with the Lord.

**The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.** 2 Corinthians 11:31

Paul now invokes the name of the Father for what he is about to say. It is certain that this is about the coming verse and not the preceding verses, because in just the verse prior he said, "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity." This was concerning future thoughts. Now, in order to show the truth of

what he will say, he invokes the name of the Father as a solemn testimony that his words will be truthful.

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is named as a confirmation of the Godhead itself. His gospel message of Christ is approved by "God the Father." The next words, "who is blessed forever" could be speaking of either "God the Father" or "our Lord Jesus Christ." In Romans 1:25, he uses "God" and "Creator" in one thought. In Romans 9:5, he uses "God" and "Christ" in one thought.

In this case, "Lord Jesus Christ" is the nearest antecedent. It appears that He is saying that "our Lord Jesus Christ is blessed forevermore" being the Son of God the Father. In other words, it is a reference to the Godhead. This might seem like over-analyzing the few words he has penned, but he has done it for a reason.

And in his invocation of the Godhead, he says that He "knows that I am not lying." Why would Paul find it necessary to make such a solemn affirmation? A few possibilities exist. First, because of the incredible nature of some of the things he is about to relay. Secondly, because there were no witnesses at hand who were available to support his claims. Third, because there may be those who charged him with not being straightforward about his claims. For these and possibly other reasons, he makes this solemn invocation.

Life application: We are shown in the word that it is not inappropriate to invoke the name of God in order to substantiate our claims, but like Paul, let us do so sparingly and for reasons which are sound. A person who continuously invokes God's name, even over minutiae, demonstrates that he probably can't be trusted in the first place. It also shows that the name of God is not held in high esteem by him.

**In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 2 Corinthians 11:32**



Paul just said in verse 30 that "I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity." After that, he gave a solemn testimony that his words were true. Now suddenly, he introduces this statement as his first evidence of his "infirmity." To set up what he considered this infirmity to be, he opens with this verse concerning his time in Damascus. It is referred to in Acts 9:23-25, but with different detail given here.

He first notes, "...the governor, under Aretas the king." The term for "governor" is used only here in the New Testament. It is *ethnarches*. It is a word consisting of two separate words: *ethnos* which means "a race" or "a people group," and *archo* which means "rule" or "reign." Thus he was the leader of the people of Damascus. Aretas, or Hareth, was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas whose capital was the city cleft out of rock at Petra. Historians suppose that Caligula placed Damascus under Aretas as a gift to him.

This unnamed governor under Aretas had "the city of the Damascenes" guarded with a garrison. This was done so that if Paul was located he was to be arrested. In addition to this guard, Acts 9 shows that Paul had other foes waiting for him as well -

"Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. <sup>24</sup> But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him."  
Acts 9:23, 24

Paul was hemmed in and any chance of getting out of the city in a normal way was considered impossible. Therefore other means had to be employed to get him out. This is detailed in the next verse and shows why he chose to name this under his list of infirmities.

Life application: If you are hemmed in from all sides, and if the Lord still has purposes for you in this life, He will get you out of the situation. Never fear that He has every circumstance in our lives completely within His capable hands.