

2nd Corinthians 11:24-27

24 Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked (NRSV).

The Scripture is written by the Apostle Paul. He has apologized if it seems like he is boasting. He has a very valid reason for doing so. Paul is an Apostle of Christ and is the founder of the Corinthian church. However, he is now forced to defend himself against false charges from his adversaries. These were Hellenistic Jews (they mixed Jewish religious tradition with Greek culture) that claimed to be superior to Paul. He argues that they are false apostles. They preached a different gospel and claim to be for Christ but have their own motives.

The question for the recipients of Paul's letter is, who should we believe? Whenever disagreements stem from opposing arguments, people have to discern who is right. The truth is revealed by the evidence. Well, the Hellenistic Jews claimed to be superior to Paul. They claimed to have better rhetorical skills, ecstatic experiences, and the ability to do mighty works. So, the Apostle Paul is forced to meet them on their turf. This goes against Christian humility. So, he apologizes for any foolishness of boasting. Paul cannot ignore the problem. The Corinthian church is being led astray. His fear is for the well being of the church; not his own well being.

In the Scripture for today is some very serious stuff. The Apostle Paul presents his evidence. He is forced to claim superiority to his opponents. The evidence is the hardship that he has endured for the gospel. He would not have endured this if it was for Paul himself. He would not have endured this if he did not have an encounter with the resurrected Lord. His endurance is for the gospel. This is his personal testimony of faithfulness and dependability.

Let's look at everything Paul went through. Acts records many of Paul's adventures and trials. This list here in 2nd Corinthians reveals more. He was persecuted from both the Jews and the Gentiles. Five times he has received forty lashes minus one. This is Jewish punishment. In Deuteronomy 25:3 it is revealed that forty lashes is the maximum punishment allowed. They practiced forty minus one for two reasons. For one it was thought that 40 could kill someone. So, they stopped at 39. The other reason was that if you went over 40 then you could receive the punishment. So, what Paul suffered was the maximum punishment five different times. Three times he was beaten with rods. This is Roman punishment that was so severe that the law prohibited this punishment to be used on Roman citizens. This occurred to Paul despite the fact that he was a Roman citizen. Once was a victim of stoning. This is a capital punishment. Stoning is a brutal form of execution. It is sickening. For him to survive it means that he was left for dead. Three times he was shipwrecked. Sea voyages were very dangerous. They relied on wind power, had limited navigation, and there was no weather forecast. Paul's life was one of danger virtually everywhere. Numerous times he was in prison, faced toil and hardship, had many sleepless nights, was hungry and thirsty, cold and naked.

The Apostle Paul has very strong credentials that his opponents do not have. His suffering is for Christ. This shows that he is Christ's Apostle. He has amazing perseverance. This all began when he encountered the resurrected Jesus. This changed his whole life. This encounter

changed his identity. This is very important to understand. It is who you are, your world view, how you see yourself, that determines what you do. Your devotion to Christ, your perseverance and determination, is determined by who you are. It is founded upon how you see yourself. For the Apostle Paul, his old identity was a well educated and faithful Jew. His action was based on this identity. So, he persecuted the church. But then he encountered the resurrected Jesus and this changed everything. It changed his whole belief mechanism. Now he has an entirely new identity that is based on his experience with the resurrected Jesus. Now he knows that Jesus is the Son of God. Now everything that he does in life is based on this revelation. So, what is significant for Paul is his new identity. He could not have endured all of the hardship if he did not know Jesus. He would not have even bothered to endure it without his new identity. Paul's new identity is that of an Apostle; a champion for Christ. His calling has tremendous responsibility that calls for tremendous endurance. No matter what happens to him he must fight for the truth and the integrity of the church.

The contemporary lesson is how all of this applies to us. We also are champions of Christ. We are the Lord's disciples. As disciples we obey the teachings of Jesus. We follow Jesus. We pattern our lives after his. We are to make disciples and teach them to obey everything Jesus taught. We are to be the New Testament church that Jesus built. That is our identity. Our behavior, what we do, and our degree of devotion, is based on this identity. Paul was repeatedly in hot water. He constantly faced danger and hardship. Out of all of this, his concern is for the church, not for the self. No matter what happened to Paul he kept praising God. No matter what happens in life, keep praising God. With Christ living inside of you, you have the power and strength to endure. Your encounter with Jesus changes everything. It is very important to understand your identity as a disciple. Being a disciple is very significant. A disciple is dedicated, devoted, and focused on Jesus. In spite of all hardship a disciple will stay true to Jesus and keep praising God.