

However bold anyone might be (I am speaking in a foolish way), I am going to be bold too. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's seed? So am I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ? (I am speaking in a crazy way.) I am even more. I've done more hard work, been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I've been close to death many times. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea. ²⁶ I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers. ²⁷ I have worked hard and struggled. I've spent many sleepless nights. I've been hungry and thirsty. I've gone without food many times. I've been cold and lacked clothing.

²⁸ Besides those external matters, there is the daily pressure on me of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak without my being weak? Who falls into sin without my being distressed?

³⁰ If it is necessary that I boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

—2 Corinthians 11:21-30 EHV

In a few weeks, coaches will meet with their teams to prepare their players for the fall sports. The team will huddle together. The coach will stand before them and lay out his or her expectations for them. And then the coach will give the commitment speech. "If you are going to be a part of this team, you must be committed to one another. We work as a team, and we play as a team. Push yourselves beyond your limit. Encourage each other. Build each other up. As coaches we are looking for players who are *all-in*."

If you have ever coached a team, you can distinguish between players who are all-in and those who are half-heartedly committed, right? It's a big difference. Coaches look for players who are all-in.

So does Jesus. Jesus wants more than half-hearted followers who hear his Word and obey his will only when they can find the time. Jesus wants followers who are all-in, followers who love him above all things, followers who would be willing to leave everything else just to be with him.

So, I'm going to ask you to conduct a self-examination of your life today. Are you all-in? Do you love Jesus more than anything or anyone else in all the world? Are you committed to following him in every part of your life, not just when it's convenient for you? Are you all-in?

You know, the apostle Paul was all-in. No matter what he faced, he wanted to only follow Jesus. In fact, Paul was willing to be looked upon as a fool by the world's standards just as long as he could follow Jesus with his entire life. God used Paul to write more than half of the New Testament Scripture, and one of those letters Paul wrote was what we call 2 Corinthians.

Paul wrote this letter to a group of Christians living in the city of Corinth. In fact, Paul started the congregation on his second missionary journey. But in the Corinthian church some deceptive leaders infiltrated the congregation, trying to discredit Paul. They were claiming that Paul was very strong in his writing, but in person he was very weak. They claimed that Paul really didn't have the authority from God to preach and teach and to proclaim and lead these Christians. They were trying to claim that they were superior to Paul. They were better than Paul. So, in his second letter he calls them the "super-apostles." They boasted that they were superior to Paul and the apostles.

So, what was Paul's solution? Well, it actually sounds a little strange to us. Paul says, "Okay. You guys want to boast? Let's boast." And you can just imagine him rolling up his sleeves and getting ready to join in the boasting game. Now, that sounds a little strange to us, because Jesus tells us not to boast.

However, understand what Paul is doing here. God's message of salvation was at stake. People's souls were at stake. These super-apostles were bad-mouthing Paul, and therefore, they were bad-mouthing his message and ministry. Paul's entire ministry was to point people to Jesus. His entire ministry was to set people free from the burden of sin by communicating who Jesus was and what he came to do. When these super-apostles were bad-mouthing Paul and his ministry, they were also bad-mouthing his message. And Paul couldn't stand there and do nothing. So, what does Paul do? He feels compelled to defend his message and ministry. Not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Christians in Corinth. Paul admits that this is going to be foolish. He's going to stoop down to the level of the super-apostles. Even though it was foolish, Paul was going to do it anyway.

So, when those super-apostles boasted about their Jewish ancestry, Paul could do the same thing. In fact, Paul could trace his ancestry all the way back to Benjamin, a child of Jacob, who was the grandson of Abraham. He writes, **“However bold anyone might be (I am speaking in a foolish way), I am going to be bold too. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s seed? So am I.”**

The super-apostles boasted about being servants of Christ. Paul was too, even more so. Paul was all-in. His entire life was all about Jesus. He writes, **“Are they ministers of Christ? (I am speaking in a crazy way.) I am even more. I’ve done more hard work, been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I’ve been close to death many times. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea. ²⁶ I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers. ²⁷ I have worked hard and struggled. I’ve spent many sleepless nights. I’ve been hungry and thirsty. I’ve gone without food many times. I’ve been cold and lacked clothing.”**

Why did Paul go through all this? Why was Paul all-in even when he faced some terrible difficulties? He did it for the sake of lost souls. People needed to hear the message about Jesus. Paul went through all this to share that message.

But Paul was a lot different from those deceptive leaders, the super-apostles. You see, Paul actually cared about the congregation. He wasn’t in this for himself. No. He was in it for others. He talks about that when he writes, **“Besides those external matters, there is the daily pressure on me of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak without my being weak? Who falls into sin without my being distressed?”** Paul was not in it for himself. He was in it for them.

And what’s more, Paul says he would rather not boast about any great things in his life. He would rather boast about his weaknesses. **“If it is necessary that I boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”** Who likes to do that? Why would Paul do such a thing? Once again, it underscores something in Paul’s life that I want to emulate.

You see, Paul knew and believed an important truth. He knew that in the darkness of human weakness and frailty, brightly shines the grace of our Lord God. Paul shared that truth in the next chapter when he talks about something he called “a thorn in his flesh.” It was some kind of weakness in Paul’s life, something he wanted gone. He thought he could be a better apostle without it. But he writes this: **“Jesus said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me. ¹⁰ That is why I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For whenever I am weak, then am I strong”** (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

Paul gives a pretty long list of his weaknesses in the words of our text today. But it was in those hard moments in Paul’s ministry when he felt weak in body and in spirit that he actually found eternal strength in the one who came and gave his life to rescue Paul from sin and death. Paul found strength in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And that’s what kept Paul going.

Just think about how committed Jesus was to his mission of saving people. Jesus was all-in for our salvation. Every day he lived for his Father in heaven. He was committed from eternity to come to this world to be the Savior of the human race. He didn’t even let the pains of hell stop him from committing to our salvation. Jesus was committed to go to the cross as the sacrifice to pay for the sins of the entire world, for your sins, for Paul’s sins.

That’s what drove Paul to be all-in. The fact that Jesus was all-in for us and our salvation drove Paul to his commitment to Jesus and his people.

And that’s what drives us, too. As you begin to realize and appreciate just how invaluable the gift of God’s grace is in your life, you begin to realize that this is a treasure to which you will be totally committed to. We go out to live a life that is all in for Jesus.

Now that doesn’t mean that you have to go out and live a life that is as burdensome as the apostle Paul’s. I don’t expect you go out and look for some sufferings or some beatings, or to live a cold and hungry life on purpose. Oh, sure, God does say that there will be suffering in the Christian’s life because we follow Jesus, but we don’t need to go look for it. However, in your own life, Jesus calls you to be all-in.

That means you go against the grain of the world. Instead of living together before marriage, you make it so clear to your family and friends that you are seeking to follow God’s design for marriage and your relationship. You will wait until marriage before you live together.

Maybe that means you will skip the Sunday morning tournament because it is more important to be in worship with your family. It's more important to give a clear testimony to your friends and family that Jesus is your priority.

Maybe that means that you recognize your shortcomings. You have not lived up to the standards that God wants you to live as his child. But you don't make excuses for that. No. You admit your shortcomings and sins. And you crave the forgiveness that Jesus offers to you in his Word and Sacrament. You long for the time when you come together at the altar and with an open hand and nothing to bring, but you receive Jesus commitment to you. "I forgive you your sins."

Oh, you and I don't want to boast about how much we are committed to following Christ. Paul didn't want to boast about that either. That's why he calls it foolish. What do we want to boast about? Well, we love to boast about how committed Jesus is to us. I love boasting about Jesus who still comes to you in his Word and Sacrament and declares to you, "I forgive you. I love you. And I will always be there for you."

When we realize that Christ says to us, "I'm all-in for you," then we are ready to say to Christ, "And I'm all-in for you, Lord." Amen.