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## 2 CORINTHIANS 11:16-21

### 2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Father, I love you. Thank you for what you've done in my heart and in my own life. Thank you for caring for me. Thank you for helping me in difficult times and challenges, and helping me to recognize that in my own weakness I can experience your strength in some great ways. Lord, I ask now that as we open your word you'd speak to us in a powerful way. We know that this is miracle time as we open your word because it's through your word that we're touched. We each come here with specific needs. I pray that you would touch each person who's come here in a special way. It's obvious that it's the power of your Holy Spirit touching them in the way that they need to be touched today. Move each one of us closer to you and closer to a personal relationship that you desire for us. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

So first I don't know what you know, but we do Facebook Live, so we're talking to a Facebook community that often logs in. I know that Nancy and Diane are watching the sermon today because you told me you weren't going to be here, but you'd watch the Facebook Live. So I'm just saying hi to you. I know there are others who are probably watching it as well. If you're not able to be here on a Sunday, Paulette faithfully videos this and you can watch it there as well. So welcome to our community that's watching via video today.

I want to address a very important challenge in all of our lives that all of us must face as we're in Christians in our growth and in our maturity. We must come to a place where we deal with the opinions of other people who think that we are foolish for being Christians. They think that we are behind the times, that we're not up to speed. They look at Christianity and kind of laugh at it as if it's kind of restraining and restricting and why would you be a part of something like that. You're going to face it, if you haven't already (most of us have), and when you do, then you need to be ready to deal with that. We're going to talk about it today because that's where Paul takes us in the passage in 2 Corinthians 11:16-21. So if you turn there with me, 2 Corinthians 11:16-21, we're going to read it in just a moment. But I want to tell you a story first.

When I was in school... And I'm telling this story to you young people. When I say young people I'm talking about middle school, high school, college folks, young adults. I had determined, as many of us have, to live my life for God. I wanted to communicate God to the people around me in ways that maybe they could receive. So I would take assignments from school and somehow try to weave into them biblical truth or God's truth. As I did, if I gave an oral report it often had some Bible verse in it, or if I was writing a paper, it often had something to do with God or the Bible or something.

I remember in college I majored in communications (speech communications) and one of the classes I took was argumentation. It's where you develop a logical argument to persuade someone to something. I know today some people don't need to take an argumentation class. They're pretty good at it already. But in my case that was part of my curriculum. When I took this argumentation class, I had to choose something to argue for. Even back in those days, people would write these papers on legalization of marijuana, gun control, the same issues we're dealing with today. They were writing papers on those things. I chose to write my paper (and I proposed this to the teacher) on the historical fact of Jesus Christ rising from the dead. He just looked at me and he said, "I don't think you can prove that, number one. If that's what you want to do, that's fine." I was in a secular university so they're kind of tolerant of different things. So he allowed me to write my paper.

When I went to work on this paper, it was a hard paper to write. It was like ten pages you were supposed to write, I ended up writing thirty pages in this paper. When I turned it into him, I got my grade back and he had written on the top "crap." That's what he wrote on it. He gave me a B-. "Crap. This is as bad a paper as I told you I was going to be." That's what he wrote on my paper.

So I took the paper I had written, which was really a good paper (I knew it was a good paper) and I happened to be working in a preschool at the time where one of the parents of the preschool was an attorney. So I said, "Would you please look over my argumentation?" because they argue for a living. So I said, "Would you please look over my paper and see if you think the grade is a fair one that he gave me?" He took my paper. And he's not a believer. This is the fun part. I was sharing Christ with him. So he wrote on it comments about how my professor was out of line here, was not being logical here, was using circulatory reasoning here, and so on. It was really fun to see, or maybe it was validating, I should say, for me to see that I had written a good paper even though I didn't get the grade I wanted. I was able to use it to witness to this guy.

But it just reminds me that in our world today there is a whole group of people who think we are really foolish for choosing to follow Christ. They have no idea, they don't understand it, and it doesn't make sense to them. So they laugh at us, they ridicule us, they roll their eyes, raise their eyebrows at us because we're Christians. So one of the marks of maturity as a Christian is to be able to deal with that and recognize that people are going to laugh at us, but we're still going to represent Jesus Christ. We're still going to hold true to being a disciple of Christ and we're going to let the chips fall where they may. It's okay if people laugh. We know what the truth is. We know what the power of God is.

In our passage today, Paul is going to use a literary vehicle called sarcasm. Some of you know sarcasm pretty well. Maybe you shouldn't be using it as much as you do. Sarcasm has two kinds of communication. It's the kind I say above the table where you're saying words, and then there's the under the table meaning of those words when you put the tone to it. So you might say, "Yeah right." That's the words above, but underneath you're saying, "I don't believe you." Or you might say, "Oh this is a great report." Well those words make it sound like you're in favor of it, but the tone of your voice puts it under the table as kind of a dig as a secondary meaning.

It's not wrong to use sarcasm, though it is dangerous, especially in family dynamics where we use it maybe to punish someone or to create digs. It can be harmful. But Paul is using that way of communicating in this passage to communicate to the leadership back in the church in Corinth. So as we read this, I'll point out some of the sarcasm so you can see it.

I'd like you to stand with me as I read this passage from God's word. You can look in your own Bibles I hope in 2 Corinthians 11:16-21. Paul says these words: *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. In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! There's a piece of sarcasm. 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. To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! Another bit of sarcasm he throws in there. Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about.*

Notice the word *fool* used several times here. We're going to talk about this idea of being a fool as Paul is defending himself as a fool for Jesus Christ.

You may be seated.

There are two ways to think about this idea of faith and Christianity. So if you're here today wrestling with whether you want to become a Christian or not, recognize that there are people who are Christians already and those people believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and they're following the Bible and they're trying to understand it and live that life. Then there are people who live with a different kind of thinking. We call that living in the world. That's kind of a worldly thinking. In that worldly thinking they end up living their own life, doing their own thing, trying to find their own way. In the midst of that they end up with challenges typically. Some of you know that all too well. You have gone your own way and not paid attention to God. Even though you might have known God earlier in your life, you've kind of done your own thing and you find yourself in a difficult place.

Now I'm going to take verse 20. Do you see verse 20 here where it says *in fact*? I'm going to take that one verse and I'm going to bring it out here and I'm going to put character terms there so you can see the five things he says are the things that characterize a person who goes their own way, does their own thing, and they end up in a bad place. Because if you're going with your own philosophy in life and not being a disciple of Christ, you end up with some troublesome things.

For examples, that enslaves you. A person who has it as their goal in life not to be a disciple of Christ but to obtain pleasure often ends up in a place of enslavement. So people end up in their teen years often making decisions that get them enslaved to things like smoking or drinking alcohol or drugs, substance abuse. But it could be also that they're not after pleasure, they're after accomplishment. And so they bury themselves in their work or they find themselves addicted to something along that line or sexuality. They find themselves addicted there. So those things are things that enslave you.

Dangerous. When you think, “I can live my life by on my own, by myself, I can do my own thing, I don’t have to be a disciple of Christ,” but as you start living your own life and using the logic that you think is good, you find yourself in bad places And so you get enslaved or it exploits you.

A common experience among teen girls when they turn fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old is they recognize that they have something that guys want. Because now when guys look at them, they don’t just look at their eyes. They look at other places on their body. And sometimes these young ladies who are really interested in feeling cherished, feeling loved, appreciated, valued, recognize that this is happening in them. They have something these guys want, so they dress in a particular way or they’ll flirt, or they’ll act in a particular way that appeals to them so they can get more of it. So what ends up happening is they’re often attracting the guys they really don’t want to be connected with because some guys are just after certain things.

So then those guys come along who would give them what they want because often guys will change and become the kind of guy that the girl wants because he’s on a mission. He’s trying to get something. So he’ll appear to be something that he’s not in order to get what he wants. And then finally when he gets what he wants, the relationship changes. Because he’s got what he wants and now she’s not getting the attention, she’s not getting the affirmation, she’s not getting what she thought she was going to get. Well that’s a good example of being exploited or taken advantage of.

I suppose the opposite is true too. There are some guys who are weak in their own sexual identity. I think it takes a lot of spiritual maturity today to manage your male sexuality and your male desires and so on. A man who doesn’t have the ability to manage those things can easily be taken advantage of by women or by the world who wants to enslave you or take advantage of you. It’s dangerous.

It’s dangerous if you aren’t a disciple of Christ and following what He wants, you can find yourself in really difficult and painful places. Of course these are the people who put on airs. What that means is they’re super spiritual. Or they look down on other people. There’s like this pride they have that “I cannot believe that you would still believe as something as archaic as Christianity. Don’t you know all the bad things that Christians have done over the years? Don’t you see what’s happening in the news here and over there? You’re still a Christian? Well that’s ridiculous. It’s so narrow-minded.”

Especially if you go to college nowadays. In the college communities, there is such a freedom. And it’s not just tolerance of freedom; it’s a promotion of freedom in all kinds of areas. That if you’re a Christian it’s a very difficult place to take a stand if you don’t have this inner core of convictions in your life. You need that inside of your heart. You need to be convinced that you have discipleship because other people are going to think you’re a fool. They’re going to treat you as a fool.

God has a different way of thinking about life than we think about. I like what Isaiah says as he’s quoting God. He says these words: *“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways*

*my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your way and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

It's really hard to comprehend the Christian life unless you are in it and you decide, “Oh yeah, I need this and I'm going to get in...” Because if you're looking at the Christian life from the outside it seems to be full of a lot of contradictions, paradoxes, things I don't understand, they don't make sense to me. Why would you do this? Why would you do that? That just doesn't make sense.

I like the quote I found. I would say it myself, but this guy says it much better than I do. Henry Clay Trumbull says this: “The law of the Christian life is a paradox. It is made up of seeming contradictions. All its teachings are contrary to the common opinions of man. According to this law, giving is getting; scattering is gaining; holding is losing; having nothing is possessing all things; dying is living. It is he who is weak who is strong; happiness is found when it is no longer sought; the clearest sight is of the invisible; and things which are not, bring to naught things which are.”

Here's a list of some paradoxes I find in our faith. Each one of these is found in a Bible story of some kind or a teaching, so we could go back and study each one. But if you look at this and you're not a Christian, you're going, “I don't understand this.” That's why they say you're foolish.

We see unseen things. It doesn't make sense, does it? Unless you're a Christian and you know that.

We conquer by yielding.

We find rest under a yoke. It's this yoke that Christ says, “I'm humble and gentle. Come and take my yoke on you and you will find rest.” So we take the yoke, which drives us in a particular direction and that direction is the pathway of fulfillment and satisfaction and peace that we would have. But it's so odd to think about. If you're not a Christian, you look at that and you go, “That doesn't make sense to me.” So they say it's foolish.

We reign by serving.

We're made great by becoming small.

We're exalted when we are humble.

We become wise by being fools for Christ's sake.

We are made free by becoming bondservants.

We gain strength when we are weak.

We triumph through defeat.

We find victory by glorying in our infirmities.

We live by dying.

If you can put yourself outside of Christianity for a moment and you look in to Christianity, you go, “Wow. That's a whole different way of thinking. That's upside-down thinking.” And there's one group of people out there that look at that and they laugh and they think that's ridiculous.

They think that's foolish. You will find those people. You will come across them and they are a challenge. But you have to remember Christ has given us a whole mandate to be different.

He's describing this whole thing in Matthew 10. He's giving all these things to His disciples about how living the kingdom life is different. As He does, He ends by saying these words: *Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.* Now is that confusing or what? Well I want you to know it's not confusing because I understand that gospel. I understand what it means to humble yourself and that God lifts you up. I understand what it means to give and it will come back to you. I know what that means and many of you know too because you've taken that leap, that step into the kingdom of God and recognize the power that exists in the midst of following God, following Christ. It's different. It's very different than the world's thinking.

So one of the steps of maturity for us is that we have to be at this place where we can move past these feelings that come when we're put down. Because if our goal is to be liked by other people, we can find it hard to be Christians and to follow Him.

This idea in 2 Corinthians that we're studying is all about the power of God found in the midst of the weakness that we experience. So there's another verse that we already talked about, but I want to read it again because it fits so well here into Paul's message about understanding that in the midst of our weakness we find the strength of God.

He says: *But we have this treasure in jars of clay* (so treasure is this amazing thing we have, but it's in these simple jars of clay) *to show the all-surpassing power* (that we are in God's strength, power) *belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*

There's this idea of power that God wants us to have. When we come to this understanding of our own weakness, a major thing happens in our lives. I want you to know that I'm not drawing attention here between the Christian and the non-Christian. I'm drawing attention between the person who's living to be a disciple of Christ and the person who's not. Some of those people are Christians. Some of the people are Christians, but they're living their own kind of thing. They're doing their own thing.

In fact I was listening this week to a man who was saying to people, "Here's what you need to do. You need to go back to the Garden of Eden and find out how you were made and how God created you because you have the potential to do anything in the world. And if you'll just have that kind of an attitude and have faith God can do that, great things will happen." Now maybe that sounds great to you, but let me just remind you there's another event that took place in history. An event that took place in history was the fall. So we can't go back to the Garden of Eden. We can't go back there. The fall has crippled us so that we all experience sin and weakness and brokenness in our lives. All of us do.

There's another event in history after that and that is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ that provides redemption and a new life for us. That's what we go back to. We don't go back and say, "Oh if I just have a good attitude, if I just have a positive attitude in my life then I can do all kinds of things." That's not godliness. That's humanism. Whether you call it godliness or not, it's still humanism. We go back to the cross and you know what we do at the cross? We kneel down. We bow before the Creator. We bow before Jesus Christ because we are weak.

Say with me, "I am weak. But I am experiencing the power of God." Okay. We don't normally wear t-shirts that say, "I am weak," do we? You wouldn't wear a shirt like that. People wear shirts that have muscles on them. I am strong. Christians have a different message and that message is one that my strength comes from something else. It comes from the power of God in my life. If someone out there wants to ridicule or laugh about it, that's their problem because I have experienced the grace of God and I know what the truth is.

I'm going to take you to 1 Corinthians. Listen to the foolishness again. Because this is one of Paul's themes to help these people realize you're Christians. Come on. You're going to be treated like fools, but if you look at how God describes this, the foolishness is really not in you, it's the people who are calling you fools that really are those people. *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved (what is it?) it is the power of God.*

Have you experienced that power of God? See if you experience the power of God, then all the upside-down thinking is not upside-down. You go, "Yes! That makes sense. I've got it. It's not foolish to me. I understand it."

*For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Notice at the top the message of the cross is foolishness. It's the cross that we go back to. Not the Garden of Eden. We go back to the cross. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

For those of you who are involved in college, you just got to know it's a lion's den out there. You will be looked at as foolish. You will be put down. You'll be persecuted in many ways, with grades or otherwise, when you take a stand for Jesus Christ. So what is that going to do to you? I'll tell you what it does to a lot of people. They start making their faith a private matter. "Well I don't want to offend anybody, so I'm not going to share my faith with anybody else." But you have to understand that God has designed us to be these lights that are going around and presenting the message of the gospel to others. So yes, some people will laugh, some people will persecute us, some people will find this to be repugnant. But there's another group of people that are interested.

How do you get from the looking at this as foolishness into being a disciple of Christ and understanding what He wants? Well there's one key word that's going to help you do that and that is the word faith. Because it's faith that moves you. I'll tell you, some of you are very intelligent and you're very logical. But you can't use logic to get saved. There's a point in which your logic can take you so far, but there is still this step of faith that gets you into this thing that looks foolish. You get in there and you go, "Whoa. Now this makes sense." And so then we live this life of faith.

As we live this life of faith so that other people can see it, do you know what happens? There's another group of people we haven't talked about yet and those are the people that are wishing for something more. They're looking at their lives and they're saying, "What I'm trying to do here is not working. My logic is not getting me anywhere except being enslaved, taken advantage of, and so on. I need something else." So we display our Christianity. We live our life of faith in a transparent way, willing to take the risk that we'll be thought of as a fool so we can win those who are ready for the gospel.

Here's the truth. Psalm 53:1 says – *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* I like the way Billy Graham responded to this. He said, "An atheist can't find God for the same way a criminal can't find a policeman – they're not looking very hard." I like that. You see, God wants to make His gospel be made known to us. And yes, you've got to understand it will appear foolish to people. But that's the risk we take. We step out there and we share the gospel in ways that some people won't understand.

But it's not just sharing the four spiritual laws. It's not just sharing the gospel with people. You know what it is? It's living. It's making decisions based on the principles that are in the Bible. People are going to look at your decisions and say, "What? You're not going to do this like the rest of us?" Or "you're going to do this?" with your time or your money or your energy or your decision-making or your sexuality. What are you going to do with those things? See, the world will think we're fools, but we know that there's something very valuable in the midst of that that we can enjoy. And there's another group of people out there that are searching and looking and wanting. When they see something in us then they go, "I want what you have."

When I was in middle school, I was given an assignment to write a paper about some person in history. It was an open assignment. So some people wrote about King Henry VIII or Christopher Columbus. I chose to write about the Apostle Paul. In my paper in eighth grade I wrote a paper about the Apostle Paul and I included some of his message that he wanted us to understand. I turned it in.

My teacher wrote at the top of the paper when she returned it to me, "If you really believe this, maybe you could come and talk to me about it after school sometime." Now for me that was like winning the lottery. I'm not involved in the lottery. To me it's involuntary tax, so I don't get involved in it at all. But I can imagine if I were to scratch something off and go, "Whoa! I actually won!" That's the experience I was having when I saw this.

I took it home to my dad and I said, "Dad, look! My teacher says come and talk to her." He says, "Okay, let's prepare." We talked, we dialogued back and forth.

I went into her room after school one day. She was at her desk by herself and I said, “Hey, I saw your note here and I stopped by to talk to you about this.” She said, “Sit down. Tell me about it. Do you really believe that?” And I did and I had an opportunity to share with her on an eighth grade level as much as I could. I shared with her the gospel and I shared with her my experience with Jesus. She said, “Thank you.” And that was basically it. She didn’t fall on her knees and accept Jesus as her Savior. Or at least not with me. But who knows. But it was a privilege for me to display my faith in a way that someone said, “I’m interested.”

The question is I think we all need to ask is, are we willing to put up with the foolish remarks that people make at us? They view us as fools. They laugh at us. They ridicule us and sometimes even persecute us or make decisions to put us down because we’re Christians. Are we willing to do that in order to win a few that are looking for something? That’s what Paul is saying. Basically Paul is saying, “Look. You want to call me a fool? Fine. I’m a fool for Jesus Christ.” The idea I guess in the passage here or in the scriptures is that we’re all fools. You’re either the fool who says there’s no God or you’re a fool for Jesus Christ.

Maybe today you’re looking at Christianity like that. You’re saying, “Wow. You’re speaking my language. I see that and kind of look at Christianity as odd. But there’s something I need that you’re talking about that I want.” I want to suggest to you that the way you get it is through faith, not through logic. There’s enough logic that brings us so that we’re able to take that step of faith, but there’s a point where you say, “Okay. I want that. I want to accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I want to dedicate myself to Him.” And maybe you even have some kind of a background where you were religious, but that’s not what we’re talking about here. We’re talking about a worldview and a moving from thinking about running my own life to allowing God to run my life is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you’re ready to make that decision today, I’d like to help you do that. I’d like to help you come to Jesus Christ.

So we’re going to sing a song in just a moment. If you’re at that place, come on up here and I’ll pray for you or the other counselors will pray for you and help you come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is a whole different way to think and I want you to know that people are going to laugh at you when you make that decision. That’s okay. You’re going to understand something that’s going to revolutionize your life. Because although the world looks at us as people who are restrained and shackled and we can’t do the things they do, I want you to know we are the people that experience tremendous freedom in our hearts. That we don’t deal with the stuff that then a lot of people are doing. Because why? We are disciples of Jesus Christ, relying on the cross that has given us tremendous freedom and power to move forward in our lives. Amen?

Let’s stand and pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I pray that in the small areas, even the small areas that each of us as Christians find ourselves retreating because of ridicule or even questioning some of our own faith because we sometimes perceive it as foolish, I pray that you’d give us the courage to stand up, to count ourselves as your children and as followers for Christ. You have such a passion, Lord, to do that in this world today where people are needing you in a personal way that people

would come to see who you are through us. We know that sometimes the only Bible some people will read is what they see at work in us or in the neighborhood or in the family. Lord, make us witnesses for you, to stand up and be counted as your disciples. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.