

**Transformed by His Wealth - Part 22 (2 Corinthians 11:1-33) Pastor Edward Cheng  
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Back at my home church we used to have a Thanksgiving service during which our pastor, Pastor Wang, would acknowledge all those who had moved away and yet came back to attend the service. Even though they moved away, he was able to remember so many details about these people's lives because he had a deep relationship with them and was personally invested in their spiritual well-being. It didn't matter that they moved away, but he was concerned that wherever they were they would be a part of a church that would strengthen their faith. I strive to have this kind of relationship with our congregation, not for my own glory but for your spiritual benefit, in order that the church may be built up. The goal of fellowship is not just to have friends, but to strengthen each other's faith when we struggle and encourage each other to pursue and persevere in faith. This is the kind of relationship Paul had with the Corinthians. Paul's opponents in the church desired to gain followers for themselves, but Paul was more concerned that they follow Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 11:1-15 Paul engages his opponents, who likely referred to themselves as "super-apostles." They care about people thinking highly of them, and about gaining a following for themselves more than the spiritual well-being of the Corinthians. They were false teachers who lifted themselves up and preyed on the Corinthians for their own personal gain. Paul says that he isn't playing that game. In v. 2 he says that his goal is to present the Corinthians as a pure virgin to Jesus. He's talking about the time when Jesus returns and the Church is presented as a bride for Christ. To be presented as a pure virgin means to remain faithful to Jesus until His return. It means pursuing faith for the rest of your life. We must persevere. We must never stop running this race until Jesus returns. This is important because our faith is constantly under attack by this world. Paul's goal was to keep the Corinthians faithful and to help them persevere until the end. However, in v. 3 we see that some have already begun to stumble. They have been deceived by these false teachers, who turned them away from Christ in order to follow them. In v. 4, 13-15 we see that these teachers did not preach the gospel and were only masquerading as apostles. We see preachers like this today, who have thousands of followers but do not preach Christ. Instead they preach the gospel of health and wealth, or a prosperity gospel.

In vv. 16-23 Paul indicates that these super-apostles talked themselves up and presented their qualifications to sell themselves to the Corinthians in order to take advantage of them. Paul says that this is all foolishness (vv. 16-17, 19, 21), but that if he wanted to be foolish, he could present just as many qualifications. This foolishness Paul speaks of is the wisdom of the world, which battles with the wisdom of God in our minds, as we saw in chapter 10. The foolish thinking of the world tells us to focus on the outward qualifications. And some preachers seem very persuasive and impressive. There are those who have megachurches with thousands of followers, but who don't preach Jesus. But these are false teachers masquerading as apostles. This is a reality that we have to recognize, and try and avoid thinking like the world, being impressed with credentials.

Finally in vv. 23-33 Paul tells us that if we do boast, we should boast in our weaknesses. He gives an extensive list of his hardships, failures, and weaknesses. This isn't like the false humility that is engrained in us by our Chinese culture, which appears to put oneself down in order to win more praise from others. Paul boasts in his weakness in order to show off God's strength. If we fail, the attention is not on us but on God, whose strength shines through in our weakness. In this world, in order to get hired you have to boast to sell yourself and present yourself as qualified. But don't let this way of thinking make you value yourself more than you ought. Don't make it all about you, make it about God. If you boast, boast in your weakness that God may be glorified. Our goal should be to point people to God, to encourage them to keep running this race, to persevere in faith. If people have to travel a long way to get to CCGC, I will encourage them to find a church closer, so that it will be easier for them to participate in the church community. Encouraging them to persevere in faith and supporting their spiritual health is more important than how big I can grow our church. For all of us, our aim should be first and foremost to support each other in faith and point each other back to God, because He is our focus.