

2 Corinthians 12:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

Analysis

I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Paul concludes his "fool's speech" (begun at 11:1) with gentle rebuke: **ye have compelled me**—their tolerance of false apostles forced him into self-defense he finds distasteful. The phrase **I ought to have been commended of you** isn't wounded pride but pastoral correction: the Corinthians should have defended Paul against slanderers, not required him to defend himself.

The contrast is cutting: **in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles** (tōn hyperlian apostolōn, τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων, "super-apostles"—dripping with sarcasm), **though I be nothing** (ei kai ouden eimi, εἰ καὶ οὐδέν εἰμι). Paul isn't inferior to the false teachers in credentials they value (visions, eloquence, letters of recommendation), yet in himself he's "nothing"—all ministry flows from Christ, not apostolic résumé.

This verse models the balance between appropriate self-defense (when gospel truth is at stake) and radical humility ("I be nothing"). Paul defends his apostleship not for ego but because rejecting him means rejecting the gospel he proclaims (Galatians 1:8-9).

Historical Context

The "super-apostles" were likely Jewish Christian teachers who came to Corinth with impressive credentials, eloquent speech, and possibly connections to the Jerusalem church. They questioned Paul's legitimacy, forcing the Corinthian congregation to adjudicate. Paul's hurt that they didn't defend him reveals the emotional cost of pastoral ministry among fickle congregations.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. When is self-defense appropriate for Christian leaders, and how does Paul model defending ministry without defending ego?
2. How can Paul simultaneously claim equality with the "chiefest apostles" yet insist "I be nothing"—is this contradiction or gospel paradox?
3. What does "ye have compelled me" teach about congregations' responsibility to defend faithful pastors against slander?

Interlinear Text

Γέγονα	ἄφρων	καυχώμενος·	ὕμεῖς	με	ἠναγκάσατε	ἐγὼ
I am become	a fool	in glorying	ye	me	have compelled	I
G1096	G878	G2744	G5210	G3165	G315	G1473
γὰρ	ὥφειλον	ὕφ'	ὕμῶν	συνίστασθαι·	οὐδέν	γὰρ
for	ought	of	you	to have been commended	in nothing	for
G1063	G3784	G5259	G5216	G4921	G3762	G1063
ὕστέρησα	τῶν	ὑπερ	λίαν	ἀποστόλων	εἰ	καὶ
am I behind	G3588	G5228	the very chiefest	apostles	G1487	G2532
G5302			G3029	G652		
οὐδέν	εἰμι					
in nothing	I be					
G3762	G1510					

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 11:5 (Parallel theme): For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.

2 Corinthians 11:1 (Parallel theme): Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.