

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· ὑμεῖς με ἡναγκάσατε ἐγὼ¹
I am become a fool in glorying ye me have compelled I
G1096 G878 G2744 G5210 G3165 G315 G1473

γὰρ ὡφειλον ὑφ' ὑμῶν συνίστασθαι· οὐδέν γὰρ
for ought of you to have been commended in nothing for
G1063 G3784 G5259 G5216 G4921 G3762 G1063

ὑστέρησα τῶν ὑπερ λίαν ἀποστόλων εἰ καὶ
am I behind the very chiefest apostles εἰ καὶ
G3588 G5228 G3029 G652 G1487 G2532

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.