

The Amateur Who Fathered Churches

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of September 2004. The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled The Amateur Who Fathered Churches.

It is based on 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 1 to 21a. Well what are you prepared to stand up and fight for?

Over the last couple of weeks I've seen many situations where I've thought we need people to stand up and fight. Fight for what is right. I was reflecting on September 11 and the terrorism that we see around. I was reflecting on Jakarta and the terrible atrocities that occurred there.

I was reflecting on Chechnya and the terrible atrocities that were occurring there. I was thinking of our government at the moment. Our government standing up and standing for what is right supposedly. I was reflecting on our synod, our Anglican synod. We're reflecting on people needing to stand up for the truth there. So the question is what are we prepared to stand up for? What are we prepared to fight for? And it seems to me that one of the answers to that question is we fight and we stand up for those things that are most precious to us. One of the pictures that I have very firmly etched into my mind with the Chechnya crisis was the father standing there with a white sheet trying to get in trying to save his children. Our children are so precious and he would do anything to get them back.

We stand up and fight for what is precious to us. Things that count. What are we going to stand up for? What counts for us? Our families? Our children? Are we prepared to stand up for the church and what we stand for here? What will we fight here for in the church? Because Paul fights very hard in these chapters that we're looking for at the moment, looking through at the moment.

[2 : 42] Paul stands up and he wants to be counted. He wants his voice to be heard because it's a fight worth fighting as we'll see in this passage.

Well Paul here uses two tactics in this fight in standing up and making a stand for the truth. One is he uses sarcasm. And the second is he uses a foolish speech. But that is, he stands up and starts boasting about himself.

But he knows that it is foolish and dangerous. He knows that it is a silly thing to do. But for Paul he has no alternative.

You see, he's in a crazy paradox. He's the true apostle of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has made him the apostle to the Gentiles.

And he's gone and planted this church in Corinth. But some false teachers have come in and they're accusing him, Paul the apostle, of being a false apostle.

[3 : 51] What a paradox. What bitter irony we have in this situation. The false apostle is calling Paul a false apostle. And so Paul wants to stand up and says, no, this is wrong. And he's going to start doing that through sarcasm and through foolish boasting.

What we're about to start this week and we'll finish next week is what is often called the fool's speech. Paul's fool's speech. Where he gets up and foolishly boasts about himself.

This week we're only going to look at the introduction to this speech. Next week we'll actually look at some of the things that he boasts in to undermine their arguments. This week it's just an extended argument that we're going to be looking at here as we get into this fool's speech that Paul gives.

But as we look through it, look at the way that he uses sarcasm. It's often been said that sarcasm is the lowest form of wit. But for Paul, he will use any tactics that he can use to actually undermine these false teachers.

But not only to undermine the false teachers, but to help those in Corinth who are following these false teachers understand the truth. So Paul says at the beginning, let me just boast a little.

[5 : 10] Let me just be foolish for a moment or two. It would be good for you to have your Bibles open at 943. 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 1. 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 1.

He states at the beginning, just bear with me a little bit here. I'm about to go into this ranting and raving of foolish boasting, so just bear with me. Stick with me here. But even in the beginning here in verse 1, you can note the sarcasm just on the tip of his tongue.

I wish you would bear with me just in a little foolishness. Do bear with me. Paul knows very well that they actually bear with foolishness all the time.

They bear with the false apostles and they're boasting. So Paul says, look, just bear with me just a little bit here. Give me a little bit of grace here. Let me do a little bit of boasting if I may. Now, we Australians, we love boasting.

We love a good boast. It starts from a very early age. I've noticed that my children love to boast about their things that they do. Well, you've got some colouring in pencils.

[6 : 14] Well, I've got 10 colouring in pencils at home. Well, I've got 100. Well, my dad's got the biggest pencil in the world. And he does the best drawings that go into all the art galleries.

Well, they don't talk about me that way, but anyhow. But boasting starts very early. And then as we get older, you know, I've got a better bike than you have. My car is better than yours. It's faster. We start talking about I've got a better employer than you.

And we start boasting in all sorts of different things. And I've noticed that even as parents, at my stage, boasting is right there. And it's in today's magazine.

It says, Go, baby, go. When motherhood turns competitive. Let me read to you just the first little bit here. And the winner is, motherhood has turned into a sport of cutthroat and competitive as Olympic final.

Is your baby crawling, walking, pole vaulting? If not, why not? It's very competitive. She's not walking yet? What level reader is your daughter on at the moment?

[7 : 20] It just goes on and on. My daughter's on level 100. We love to boast. But Paul is embarrassed to boast.

That's why we have this long introduction. Paul knows that when we boast about ourselves, we take the focus off Christ. And we put it on ourselves. So Paul is embarrassed to start blowing his own trumpet.

But he knows that he has no alternatives. That he must start standing up and speaking about himself. That he must boast about the things in his life if he is to undercut these super apostles.

But he knows that it's worth it in the end. He knows that it is worth him getting involved in this boasting and this sarcasm. So look there in verses 2 and 3.

He points out here why it is worth it. Paul sees himself here as the father of the church.

[8 : 35] He sees the church as his daughter. And he is filled with such pride with his daughter. And he wants on that last day when God said, Who brings this church to be married to my son, Jesus?

Paul wants to be able to stand up and say very proudly with a tear in his eye, I do. I present this church. He wants to feel himself with such a desire to see them pure.

And to be sincere. To be a chaste virgin for Christ. He wants to be the spiritual father. But like any father, he doesn't want to be ashamed on that day.

Or humiliated. Knowing that his daughter, daughter's chastity has been compromised by flirtation with some other men before the marriage day.

Paul is concerned that the church has been flirting with other gospels. Flirting with other doctrine and truth. That they've been led away from a pure, sincere devotion to Christ.

[9 : 49] And he's deeply concerned about it. Deeply concerned. And so he must boast. In verses 3 and 4 he goes on to talk about what he wants to focus on.

As opposed to what the church, the false apostles want to focus on. For as some comes and proclaims another Jesus and the one we proclaimed. Or to receive a different spirit from the one you received.

Or a different gospel from the one that you accepted. You submit to it readily enough. But Paul is concerned that they are following a different gospel. For Paul, his focus was on Christ.

Christ crucified was at the centre of his preaching. That is where people came to be in a relationship with God. His focus was on the cross.

But for the intruders, well it appears not so for them. They're more concerned about powerful deeds and eloquent speech. For aesthetic experiences. For them, Christ crucified was something that was a weakness.

[10 : 53] And was unlikely to get a great mention. It would not be central for them. But for Paul, this is a different gospel. This is a different Christ that they are preaching.

And Paul is very concerned about it. Very, very concerned. So in verses 5 and 6, he asserts that he is not inferior to them. He may not be a professional speaker, we see there in verse 6.

He may not have the most eloquent tongue. He may not be able to match it with all the people of the day. And their rhetorical skills. But for him, he processes knowledge.

That is, for him, content is more important than the way he speaks. In verses 7 to 11, Paul appears to take up a new topic.

The new topic being that he refuses to accept the financial support of the Corinthian community. But here, Paul is just, again, as a part of this extended introduction to this whole section of boasting.

[12 : 00] He wants to point out, as we see later on, what the super apostles are on about. And what they are boasting. What it really amounts to. So Paul says, in verses 7 to 11, that he won't accept their money.

For Paul, he is a missionary. And to be a missionary, when he goes into a new place, he does not accept money from that new place. He wants to reflect the gospel that he actually proclaims.

It is a gift. It is free. And so Paul wants to come into a place and say, look, here is the gospel. It's a free gift. Don't pay me any money. I'm actually being supported by other people.

So as we see there, there are other friends in Macedonia. There are places that are supporting him financially. But for Paul, he won't accept the money from the Corinthian church.

Now, this is particularly relevant for the Corinthian church. For them, they love to be able to boast in the things that they've done. So they say, yeah, you know, see that temple over there? We paid for that.

[13 : 05] Now, that's our, we paid for that temple. Or, you know, see these buildings, these grand buildings? They're ours. We're good, aren't we? They wanted to be able to boast.

But in terms of paying for speakers, that was a good way of boasting as well. See that Paul the apostle, we paid for him to come here. Aren't we good? But Paul wants none of it.

Paul doesn't want to be a patron of someone, to have patronage paid to him. Paul's not interested in being a professional entertainer, a peddle of religious quackery. He doesn't want to be a charlatan selling religion for money.

He doesn't want to be involved in that. He comes and proclaims the gospel free of charge. And so he asked there in verse 7, is it a sin that I do this?

Is it a sin that I come and humble myself before you in this way? In verses 8 and 9, he says, look, I refuse to take money from you, and yet I rob other churches. I'm being supported by other places.

[14 : 06] They're the ones who are supporting me. And he says, I'm going to boast all the more in this. And then verse 11, he says, I guess he's picking up perhaps some of the charges that are laid against him, that he doesn't love them.

I guess the charge is, is that for Paul, Paul is sinning by not actually accepting the money. That Paul is also doing this because he doesn't love the Corinthian church.

You can just hear the apostles saying that, can't you? Paul doesn't love you. He won't even accept your money. We'll take your money. Give it to us.

We love you. We love you so much. Just give us the money. We'll be your patrons. But Paul says, no, I don't want to be involved in that. But let me assure you, I do love you.

I love you deeply. In verses 12 through to 15, he goes on to talk about how this issue of financial support is linked in with his boasting.

[15 : 09] See, Paul will boast in the fact that he's supported by others. But for the Corinthian church, their boast is an ungodly boast. The language that we see here is very extreme.

Paul attacks them harshly. Look there in verse 12. And what I do, I will also continue to do in order to deny them an opportunity, to those who want an opportunity, to be recognised as our equals in what they boast about.

The false apostles wanted to be the equal of Paul. They wanted to be our same. Look, we're just the same as Paul. In fact, we're even better than Paul. We have money. People pay us money to come and speak to them.

But Paul won't do that. Paul says, no, no, no. Look beneath the skin of these false apostles. Look beneath their clothing. For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

And no wonder, even Satan disguised himself as an angel of light. Here Paul makes it very clear that they are a people who are trying to disguise themselves, that they are masquerading themselves as godly people.

[16 : 23] But it's just a sham. Satan is actually working in and through their lives, these false apostles. And Paul wants to point it out very clearly. What an attack to be told that you're actually working for the wrong side, to be told that you're actually working for Satan that you're going to go to hell.

These are very strong words. Very fierce, this passage is. So emotionally intense. But Paul knows that what is at jeopardy here is a relationship with Jesus.

He knows that these false apostles are fakes. Spiritual snakes in the grass, ready to drag them down. And so Paul wants nothing to do with them.

A few years before coming down to Melbourne, one night we went to a Christian meeting. And it was a great time of hearing God's word proclaimed. And after, we went with a few friends to a cafe.

And just as we were coming to the cafe, some Mormons were walking down the road. And I was feeling particularly courageous. And so when they came up and asked me who I was and, you know, asked a few little preliminary questions, I decided I'm going to chat to these people.

[17 : 45] And so we got talking and I said, look, I go to a particular church. He said, oh, well, we go to this church here. And you really need to come along to our church. And I said, oh, that doesn't seem to be what the Bible says.

The Bible seems to be saying that, you know, we don't have to go to a particular church. That seems to be adding something to the gospel. If you want to be saved, you need to go to your church. That seems to be adding something to the gospel here.

And, you know, I pointed out that in Galatians, that if anyone or anything, or even an angel, should add anything to the gospel, well, they should be anathema. You know, it's not good. And the bloke turned to me and said, no, no, no.

You're going to go to hell. I thought, my goodness. Hang on a moment. Am I in the wrong boat here? Am I going to go to hell? Have I got it all wrong?

Have I really been mistaken all this time? And this Mormon's got it right. I thought, no, no, no. I've got the words of truth that God has given us.

[18 : 42] It's okay. But for that split second, I thought, hang on a moment. This man's making a very serious accusation that I might go to hell because I was following the wrong person, Jesus Christ, following a different picture to what they had.

Paul is making a fierce accusation here that these workers are workers of Satan. In verses 16 through to 21, Paul comes back again to ask them to bear with him.

And he's about to embark, as we see next week, on this foolish speech where he will boast in all sorts of different things. But he says, look, just for a moment, just bear with me.

Just stick with me on this one. I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool. But if you do, then accept me as a fool so that I may boast a little. What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool.

Since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast. Paul says, look, this is not the Lord's authority of me standing up here and boasting about all my skills and that type of thing.

[19 : 55] But I'm going to get involved in it because you're actually used to this. And I'm going to boast also so that you may see the truth and see the truth of what these charlatans are really like.

Paul then goes on in verses 19 and 20, you can hear the sarcasm there. He says, for you gladly put up with fools. You guys are so wise in the way that you put up with fools.

You're so wise there. Well, then if you can put up with fools, then you can surely put up with me. Because if you can put up with me, I've seen the way that you put up. Look there in verse 20. You put up with it when someone makes slaves of you or prays upon you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or gives you a slap in the face.

You're so wise in the way that you accept this from fools. You're just so clever. Hear the sarcasm. Paul's pointing out that they're so eager to listen to what these false apostles have to say.

Paul says, if you can put up with them and their foolishness and accept it, then put up with me just for a little bit. Paul says there in verse 21, to my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that.

[21 : 10] Paul says, look, you might be able to be really wise and listen to this, all this foolishness and accept it, but I'm sorry, I'm just not quite as good as you to be able to get slapped in the face or to accept what they're saying or to follow their teaching.

I'm so sorry, I'm not as good as you. You can just hear the sarcasm dripping off his lips. But for Paul, he needs to do this that they might understand the truth.

Well, next week, we'll see what more, what Paul has to say about this boasting. We'll see what he will boast in and how that will help his argument and he will show how foolish the super apostles are.

But for us, in this introduction that we've just had, this full speech, this extended introduction, there are a few things that we need to take away from this. The first thing is that we need to take away is the whole reason why Paul is actually giving this speech.

It's because of the gullibility of the church. You see, there's this minority in Corinth who just want to listen. Their itching ears are eager to hear what the super apostles have to say.

[22 : 23] They want to hear about this Christ that is so triumphant. They don't want to hear about the crucified Christ. They're eager to hear what they want to hear. Things that build themselves up.

We are a people, not just back then, but throughout church history, where are people who will believe in anything. In 1822, a man by the name of Smith was visited by an angel.

This heavenly angel came to him and directed him to find some gold plates that happened to be in the hillside in New York State. Now, inscribed on these plates, these gold plates, was ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.

And he was enabled to read them by these specially provided angelic glasses. So once he put these little special glasses on, these gold plates he was able to read.

And I wish I had glasses like that. That would be great when reading the Hebrew or the Greek or something like that. But these little glasses given by the angel to him. On translation of these plates, there were some extraordinary facts.

[23 : 37] The first thing is that actually Christopher Columbus wasn't the first person to discover America but a Jewish family some 600 years before Christ. And that actually Christ actually appeared to this Jewish family in America and it's a great story that we have here.

Well, do you know there are over 3 million people who believe in this? The Church of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons they call themselves. 3 million people believe in it.

Trusting in a man who has been given spectacles by an angel to read gold plates that gave him great understanding. We are a people who easily believe different things.

You see, I think the danger in our church is not actually unbelief but I think the danger is where our belief is actually skewed. It's not that scepticism is the problem but it's superstition.

It's not that we're irreligious I think is the problem but it's that we're gullible. It's not the problem is not the doubter the problem is the deceiver.

[24 : 57] Church history is proven at time and time again. what we do is we take the truth and just twist it. The danger for the church is not from the outside but from the inside.

We don't have to worry about the attacks that come from us from ideology or philosophy or religious rivals. They're not the serious threats to Christianity.

The serious threats come from within. people who came to be reporters of the truth but then deny that Jesus ever rose or that Jesus is not the unique way to actually get to heaven.

People who sabotage the truth. Therefore my warning to you is don't be fooled by words. Keep on checking them against scripture.

When someone preaches to you have God's word out open before you. Keep on checking it. It doesn't matter how eloquent they are or how gifted they are with words.

[26 : 05] What is more important as verse 6 says is the content of what they preach. We are very blessed with Paul Barker who works very hard at the text that we might understand it.

A person who is concerned for the truth. Since he's been away there have been many times where I have felt overwhelmed by the position that I'm in.

To be able to talk to people about their different circumstances. To talk to people about their different situations. Being concerned that I'd say the right things.

And the thing that's driven me back to is the Bible. I want to know God's word. I want to know how that I might instruct people in the truth in the right way.

Not according to what their itchy ears want to hear or what I want to do to make myself look good. We need to be people who are not fooled by words.

[27 : 06] Secondly, we need to be people who are not naive about money. Paul makes it very firm that he has a policy about money that he won't accept money to be a corrupt preacher. It's too easy for money to corrupt preaching.

Paul makes it clear that he's not going to be a salesman to gain financial gain from peddling pop religion. He doesn't want to be involved in that.

And so he makes a very clear line between where the money should come from and how it should be used. But it's also I think it's important for us to understand that as a congregation.

Are you paying money into this church? Are you sacrificing your own finances to be able to provide here just so that you can be entertained for half an hour?

That you might have a quality performance? Is that what it's all about? If a preacher is not willing to preach for nothing then he shouldn't preach at all.

[28 : 05] Once we see that preaching is a professional career then the problem with that is it ends up being that preachers become puppeteers and they'll say the kinds of things that will keep an audience happy and keep the cash coming in.

My third point is we need to be people who stand up for the truth. People who will stand up and fight for what is right. We live in an age where tolerance is the big word.

Be tolerant of all sorts of different things. But Paul's not prepared to be tolerant when people's relationships with Christ are in jeopardy. We need to be people who are prepared to stand up and fight for what is right.

For in the end Paul's not interested in growing churches in terms of their numbers for the sake of growing big churches. What Paul is interested in is growing God's glory.

Growing people who grow in Christlikeness. May we be people who are like that. Growing in Christlikeness. People who are not fooled by words.

[29 : 14] Who are not naive about money. I prepare to stand up for what is right. May God enable us to do this by his spirit. Amen.