

FIVE MINUTES IN THE WORD
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GIVE ME
A HEARING!



1CORINTHIANS 11:17

**In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would,
but as a fool. NIV**

In Greek theater, the “fool” allowed the playwright to address his audience boldly about a particular issue. Paul may be drawing on this idea to make the point that he should be given a hearing even if the Corinthian believers disagree with him. *Faithlife Study Bible* (2 Co 11:17).

This is an excellent question—and **yes**, the Corinthians would have had *very specific, cultural images* in mind when Paul calls himself a “fool.” He is not speaking abstractly. He is drawing from **Greco-Roman theatrical and rhetorical culture** that Corinth knew well.

Below are **concrete examples of “fools” in plays and performances** that would have shaped how the Corinthians heard **2 Corinthians 11:16–18**.

1. The Comic Fool (μωρός / moros) in Greek Comedy

(This is the most important category for Paul’s language.)

What the Corinthians knew

In **Greek New Comedy** (e.g., Menander—very popular in Roman Corinth), the *moros* was:

- socially inferior
- verbally exposed
- mocked for lack of wisdom
- tolerated because he was entertaining
- allowed to speak truths **only because he was ridiculous**

He could say things respectable people could not—*because no one took him seriously*.

Why this matters for Paul

When Paul says:

“Accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little” (11:16)

He is effectively saying:

“Let me take the role of the ridiculous speaker you tolerate—because you only listen when truth comes wrapped in entertainment.”

That is biting irony.

2. The Braggart Soldier (Miles Gloriosus)

(A stock character Corinthian audiences would immediately recognize.)

Description

This figure:

- boasts constantly of victories
- exaggerates exploits
- claims superiority
- is loud, confident, impressive
- is ultimately exposed as empty or cowardly

He **talks like a hero** but collapses under scrutiny.

Paul's reversal

The false apostles behave like **braggart heroes**.

Paul adopts the *form* of boasting—but fills it with:

- suffering
- weakness
- beatings
- imprisonment
- humiliation

This would feel **deliberately wrong** to Corinthian ears—and that is the point.

Paul becomes an *anti-braggart soldier*.

3. The Parasite / Clown

(Especially relevant to Corinth's patronage culture.)

Description

A parasite was:

- socially dependent
- flattering to elites
- willing to humiliate himself for favor
- tolerated for amusement
- not respected

He survived by pleasing powerful people.

Paul's contrast

Paul **refuses patronage**, refuses flattery, refuses payment.

Yet by calling himself a “fool,” he ironically places himself *lower* than the parasite—while remaining free.

This exposes the false apostles as the **real parasites**, living off Corinthian admiration and money.

4. The Cynic “Street Philosopher” as a Mocked Fool

(Especially relevant in Roman Corinth.)

Some Cynic philosophers:

- dressed poorly
- rejected social norms
- spoke bluntly
- mocked elites
- were seen as crude or foolish

Though some were sincere, many were **performative shock-artists**, using foolishness to gain attention.

Paul's distinction

Paul **looks** like such a figure to Corinthian elites—but he refuses spectacle, manipulation, or self-promotion.

He is not playing the fool to gain attention—but to **expose their values**.

5. Why Corinthians Would “Put Up With” Fools (11:19)

Paul will say next:

“For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!”

In Corinthian culture:

- fools were tolerated
- respected teachers were judged
- entertainers were indulged

Paul is indicting their taste:

“You tolerate nonsense and resist truth.”

One-Line Summary (Culturally Sharp)

Paul adopts the role of the comic fool—not to entertain, but to expose a church that has learned to admire performers instead of shepherds, confidence instead of truth, and appearance instead of the cross.

Why This Makes Paul’s Strategy Brilliant

- He speaks **inside their cultural grammar**
 - He exposes boasting by exaggerating it
 - He dismantles honor culture from within
 - He turns the fool into the truth-teller
 - He forces the Corinthians to confront *why* they listen
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Below is a **direct, unsparring map** from Paul’s “fool” strategy in **2 Corinthians 11** to **modern celebrity-preacher culture**. This is not abstract—it is diagnostic.

Paul’s “Fool” vs. Modern Celebrity Christianity

(A Theological Map)

1. Audience Appetite

Corinth

- Loved rhetorical polish
- Valued confidence and dominance
- Equated success with divine favor
- Tolerated entertainers more than truth-tellers

Modern Church

- Drawn to charisma, platform, virality
- Measures blessing by growth and influence
- Confuses visibility with authority
- “Puts up with” shallow teaching if it inspires

Paul’s diagnosis applies unchanged:

You gladly tolerate fools while resisting shepherds.

2. The Performer-Teacher

Corinthian False Apostles

- Impressive speech
- Self-promotion
- Spiritual bravado
- Claimed superior authority
- Benefited materially from ministry

Modern Celebrity Preachers

- Personal branding
- Curated vulnerability

- Confidence marketed as faith
- Spiritual language mixed with self-help
- Financial and lifestyle elevation

Shared trait: ministry becomes a *stage*.

3. Boasting Content

False Apostles

- Credentials
- Visions
- Authority claims
- Status comparisons

Celebrity Christianity

- Platforms
- Followers
- Testimonials
- Influence metrics
- Lifestyle optics

Paul's Counter-Boast

- Beatings
- Hunger
- Anxiety for the churches
- Weakness
- Daily pressure

Only one boast resembles the cross.

4. View of Weakness

Corinth

- Weakness = disqualification
- Suffering = failure
- Humility = inferiority

Modern Church

- Struggles carefully curated
- Weakness shown only when safe
- Failure rebranded as “season”

Paul

“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.” (11:30)

Paul makes weakness the **credential**, not the liability.

5. Financial Dynamics

False Apostles

- Accepted patronage
- Depended on admiration
- Incentivized flattery

Modern Celebrity Model

- Monetized attention
- Donor-driven messaging
- Algorithm-shaped theology

Paul

- Refuses money to protect gospel clarity
- Will suffer misunderstanding rather than compromise freedom

The test: Who is free to offend for truth?

6. Discernment Failure

Corinth

- Compared apostles
- Ranked ministries
- Admired appearances
- Missed deception

Modern Church

- Platform comparison
- “Who’s more anointed?”
- Influence as legitimacy
- Resistance to correction

Paul’s warning:

Satan’s servants look righteous.

Discernment must go deeper than aesthetics.

7. Paul’s “Fool” Strategy Today

If Paul preached today, he would likely:

- Be called “negative”
- Be told he lacks influence
- Be accused of bitterness
- Be ignored by algorithms
- Be respected by the wounded

His foolishness would still expose what we love.

Final Diagnostic Question (Then and Now)

Do we trust voices that make us feel strong—or voices that lead us to the cross?

Paul's "fool" unmask a church problem that transcends centuries:
we are tempted to admire what looks powerful instead of what is faithful.

Sources:

ChatGPT

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Faithlife Study Bible