

Preachers' Gatherings 2016

Preaching 2 Corinthians

Booklet 2

Suggested Sermon Outlines

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Sermon outline for 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Challenge and comfort in life, ministry and mission

What was the apostle Paul seeking to achieve? 2:14-17; 3:6; 4:2,5; 5:18-21

So what did Paul get for all his efforts in mission?

- 2:1-4 struggles with his churches
- 2:12-13 struggles with loneliness
- 4:8-12; 5:2-5; 6:4-10; 11:23-33
Struggles with pain and opposition

Was it actually worth all the hassle, Paul?

1. Paul experienced the comfort and character of God – 1:3-7
2. Paul experienced the deliverances of God – 1:8-9
3. Paul experienced the assurance of ultimate safety – 1:10
4. Paul experienced dependence on the power of prayer – 1:11

This sermon outline accompanies the live introductory sermon (with power point) on day 1 of the Preachers' Gatherings Nov 2016

Sample Sermon:

Our resources for global mission 2 Cor 2:12 - 3:6; 10:3-5

Paul's 2nd Corinthian Letter –

Personal, Painful, Passionate, Perplexing... and at the moment I'm actually trying to get away from the use of excessive alliteration in sermons! There'll be no more alliteration in this sermon and that's a – *Promise!*

The apostle Paul was dealing with intense and persistent criticism from some who had infiltrated the Corinthian Church and had challenged his authority as an apostle. They wanted to elevate themselves into leadership in the eyes of the believers by putting Paul down, thus gaining control over the church. This was not only a personality battle, but much more seriously, they were gaining influence through what was actually a different Jesus, a different Spirit and thus a different gospel. (2 Cor 11:4)

They claimed Paul was a poor speaker, lacking proper credentials and presenting a weak message and unimpressive personal presence. They rubbished him as having courage or leadership qualities only when he was writing by letter from a safe distance. Paul refused payment and financial support from the Corinthians, so it would seem to them that his message couldn't be up to much! Even his enthusiasm to collect help for the poor Jerusalem Christians was suspected as a 'cover' to line his own pockets (2 Cor 12:16-18). The Sophists – 'wise men' – by contrast, taught for prestige and material gain, boasting of their credentials. Paul took an opposite line (1 Cor 2:4), refusing to use 'wise and persuasive words'. These false apostles claimed and carried Christian credentials but were actually deeply rooted in pagan culture, yet lacking awareness of their own conditioning!

It was a lose-lose situation for Paul and he was being hammered from every quarter! There MUST have been times when the apostle said to himself in his darker moments – 'Did I get my guidance as apostle to the Gentiles completely screwed up? Why is my life such a mess? Why did I get myself involved in the church and Mission? Yet, at the same time he knew that what was at stake in Corinth was the survival of the Church and the Gospel! That's why he was so distressed by the Corinthian situation and desperately wanted news from Titus about the state of the church there.

At this point in time, God had opened a door for the gospel in Troas, but Paul was ‘paralyzed for Mission’. He failed to take up this golden opportunity for Mission, so preoccupied was he over the state of the church in Corinth as he waited for news from Titus! The evangelist to the Gentiles could not focus on evangelism! He screwed up a gospel occasion. It’s not hard to imagine what his critics in Corinth would say – the man’s a miserable failure? He’s incompetent. He’s not fit to be on the mission field!

Let’s therefore ask the questions that the apostle was probably asking himself:

What weapons do we have for the spiritual challenge of Mission?

What resources can we employ for this enormous global task?

1. Divine Power in Human Weakness 2 Cor 2:14-16

Paul’s stress and anxiety over the Corinthian Church were not the failures his critics would label them, but rather on the contrary, they were part of Paul’s apostolic suffering through which God’s presence and power were being displayed.

Corinth was a Roman colony and Paul’s readers there would be very aware that the Roman armies held huge public processions in which they led and paraded their defeated enemies. To be led in triumphal procession actually indicates defeat and failure. Paul is NOT doing the leading here; he is the direct object of the verb. He is being led like a ‘prisoner of war’ in defeat. God is in a real sense leading the apostle Paul towards his death, because after the processions, the Roman leaders selected certain of their defeated foes and executed them to their gods, often choosing crucifixion as their method. This was believed to bring GLORY to the Roman gods, armies and Emperor.

Now we know two things – a) Yes, in a very real sense, God had conquered Paul on the Damascus Road and now leads Paul in his promised suffering towards a death that will ULTIMATELY reveal the majesty, power and glory of God, Paul’s conqueror. b) Yes, in our eternal salvation, we are ULTIMATELY triumphant over all the powers by the saving grace and power of God. HOWEVER, the spotlight here in 2:14 focuses on God’s sovereign work of Mission, in which God uses our suffering, pain and apparent failure in Mission. He does this in order to reveal HIS STRENGTH AND POWER through the human weakness and impotence of His servants in Mission.

The result is that KNOWLEDGE OF GOD is spread through Paul's suffering in the form of the 'fragrance of Christ' that rises up to God out of Paul's living sacrifice. Result: those being saved recognize and welcome Paul's pain as an expression of God's glory in the Cross, while those perishing reject Paul's suffering as foolishness because they reject the message of the Cross.

OUR message of the Cross and OUR embodiment of that message in our suffering because of that Cross, will together determine the move towards salvation or towards judgment in the lives of those we seek to reach. We stand between life and death for those we encounter and engage with. Does suffering and anguish and hassle and pain INTERRUPT our mission and ministry?

NOT AT ALL. They ARE our witness and mission and ministry (2 Cor 2:14-16). They are not wasted time. They are an integral part of God's mysterious way of bringing GLORY to Himself in His work of redemptive mission (2 Cor 4:16-18).

2. Divine Power in the Word Of God 2 Cor 2:17

Is it any wonder that at the end of such an awesome and challenging three verses, Paul asks the question – 'And who is sufficient for such a task?' Paul believes that God IS revealing Himself through the apostle's suffering and that is his hope and confidence for mission. But there's more!

Verse 17 actually begins with the word translated 'for' or 'because'. Paul is confident in God because he has the Word of God and, unlike the false apostles, Paul and his co-workers preach it free of charge rather than for personal gain, prestige and a fat wallet at the end of the day. Paul had sacrificed his material support from the Corinthians because of his love for them and his determination to put no stumbling-block to the effective work of the gospel. Eg. I asked Youth Ministry ICC students what young folk out there in the world were looking for in life and people. United answer of the whole group – 'AUTHENTICITY'. Paul's words WERE matched by his actions. Paul's lifestyle, including his suffering, reveals his sincere motives and this in turn reflects the grace of God. He testifies in 2 Cor 1:12 that in his actions his conduct has been lived out 'in the holiness and sincerity that are from God' and NOT based on worldly wisdom.

In verse 17 Paul affirms that he speaks ‘in Christ’, ‘before God’ and is ‘sent by God’. Authentic ministry in the Word of God transforms lives, beginning with those who minister the Word. Paul’s own life and ministry were anchored in the Word, but suffering was an inescapable and unavoidable part of that life. That is the same challenge we face today in mission! Pain is part of Biblical Ministry, but so is POWER e.g. 45 years ago this month, I heard 30 minutes of Biblical gospel preaching in a church in Durham and my life was totally turned around by it!

3. Divine Power in the Working of the Holy Spirit for Life Transformation 2 Cor 3:1-6

When Paul’s ‘triumphant’ critics saw his suffering and weakness, they rejected the authenticity and authority of his apostleship. This of course parallels the suffering and weakness of Christ on the Cross. How can you possibly have a ‘crucified Messiah’ – a total contradiction in terms; the ultimate oxymoron. If you reject that crazy paradox, then you also will fail to see through Paul’s pain into its utter glory!

The truth is that the apostle Paul did not need any ‘letter of recommendation’ such as the false apostles handed each other (3 v.1). The Corinthians themselves had been converted and changed under his ministry, becoming a readable ‘letter from Christ’. THEY are the evidence of the power of the Spirit in and through Paul’s ministry. As long as Paul embodied the gospel, then he mediated the Spirit. The false apostles made great triumphalist claims to eloquence of speech, prosperity, superstars, ecstatic experiences, victories, reputation, prestige, conquests, powerful presence – all the hallmarks of what they considered to be the measure of true apostleship. The one thing they could not do was to change lives and build authentic churches! In and through Paul’s suffering and weakness, that’s precisely what the Spirit did through Paul. The Spirit used Paul to mediate the New Covenant promises in and through Christ and this is what the apostle deals with from 2 Cor 3:7 onwards. The EXISTENCE of the Corinthian Church, loaded with problems as that church was, nevertheless validated Paul’s apostleship. E.g. Each of the 4 Christian students I lived with in Durham Castle was a ‘letter from Christ’ and the Spirit whose work that was, drove me to church in Durham that June evening in 1971, 45 years ago.

The mediation of the life-changing work of the Spirit in people's lives comes entirely from God – He is the One and the only One who makes us competent for mission. We depend absolutely on the Lord in and for mission. It IS His work. He glorifies Himself by delivering us, preserving us and providing for us in a New Covenant relationship that spills over and expresses itself in mission. God cannot fail in His mission and that gives us huge encouragement to respond to Him – by obeying, trusting and persevering, however hard the going might get – as it did for the apostle Paul! But will all this work out in practice in our work of mission?

4. Divine Power in the Demolition of Resistance to God 2 Cor 10:3-5

The Corinthians were locked into what theologians call 'over-realized eschatology'. In other words, they believe they'd already attained a heavenly existence where everything is spiritual and they could expect to know unlimited spiritual power, victory in all circumstances, fullness of healing, continuous and victorious Christian living. They felt they had already left behind worldly and fleshly issues like servanthood, humility, costly discipleship and sharing in the suffering of Christ here and now. So they accused Paul of being stuck in this world, to which Paul concedes in verse 3 'Yes, I'm very firmly still in this world BUT MY WEAPONS are not of this world'.

Paul's weapons are divine AND spiritual – that's why they have such power and their power is so great as to demolish strongholds. The intruders have the very different weapons of this world – fine speech, human cleverness, showmanship, pushiness, charm, personal charisma. By contrast, in verse Paul and his workers have weapons of a totally different sort that 'demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ'.

The word 'arguments' can be translated 'thoughts' and 'plans'. Nothing wrong with thoughts and plans, but Paul means that his weapons destroy sinful thought patterns that reinforce human rebellion against God. All arrogant claims, proud actions and selfish thoughts that create human barriers of independence to true knowledge of the living God. We display claimed intellectual doubts, skepticism, arrogant cynicism, superiority of position – the attributes of the 'depraved mind 'to which God has given us over (Rom1:28-32) – but from which we cannot actually know the Lord, the crucified Christ. (1 Cor 1:21-24) Human pride seeks endless ways to

ridicule faith, mock the church and construct subtle and sophisticated arguments to keep at arms' length, and at all costs, the knowledge of God. These devious thoughts and plans, says Paul, are captured by Christ (v.5) and brought under a completely new allegiance and authority, that of Christ.

Faced with all manner of spiritual enemies and labeled by Jews as 'a stumbling block' and by Gentiles as 'nonsense', yet this 'foolish' message of Paul's gospel was taking captive every barrier, argument and pretension. It was breaking, cross-culturally, the proud and stubborn minds, hearts and wills of men and women, bringing them to the crucified and risen Christ and to a new life in Him.

God's weapons are available to us today. Aggressive arguments will not take a rebellious person captive. Our calling is to use the arsenal listed in Eph 6:13-18 to demolish the stronghold of the rebel mind. Proclaim and explain the gospel; pray fervently; live out the gospel of peace; walk rightly and righteously by faith. Eventually people will realize we have a handle on another world, another life, another citizenship. The power of Truth, Spirit and Christ will smash even the strongest pretences and defences, bringing folk into the glory of a new life.

What was The Nature of the Gospel Paul had embraced in Mid 1st Century AD?

Dr David Smith in *Liberating the Gospel* has pointed out the different first century Pauline understandings of the term ‘gospel’

- a) The fulfillment of the prophetic promise that Yahweh would usher in hope and *shalom* to the entire world.
- b) The Roman setting of ‘gospel’ would mean the celebration of the birth or new reign of an emperor or king or Caesar.
- c) The gospel of Paul proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and as Lord (*Kyrios*). Clearly, ‘Messiah’ had OT roots but so did ‘Lord’, yet Caesar required not only taxes from the populace but also their worship and their practice of Imperial Cult Sacrifices, since he was rapidly being viewed as the chief divinity in the Greco-Roman world and as the one who had brought justice and peace to the whole world. Caesar was ‘Lord’ and ‘Saviour’.

Local gods could be incorporated into the pantheon without causing a stir *but Jesus, the crucified criminal, was challenging the very idea of a pantheon* and was bringing in a *profoundly counter-cultural transformative kingdom which carried a deep threat to empire!!* Paul believed that the church’s role was to be counter-cultural without becoming anti-cultural. The suffering and weakness of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection – modelled in Paul’s own life – was God’s secret wisdom for real peace and power, completely foreign to rulers of empires.

As Paul indicates in 1 Cor 1:18-2:16, he is actually challenging and critiquing the privileged and powerful hierarchy of the Roman Empire, whilst upholding the value of the weak and oppressed in the Empire. Although he himself was a humiliated captive of his opponents in the opposition he faced, he was at the same time ‘captured’ by God and thus displayed the true power and authority of the Christ of the true gospel. The Empire claimed to be spreading peace, order and wellbeing (‘*Salvation*’) but it did so through domination and oppression, requiring obedience and servitude to its ‘*Lordship*’ of cult, leaders and institutions. The Roman Empire had assumed a divine authority which, despite outward splendour,

was always going to lead to moral decay, social division and profound injustice, as those with ‘honour’ were free to exploit, abuse and crush the vast numbers of poor people who formed the underside of the Empire. ***Paul’s gospel deeply challenged this Roman worldview.***

Paul’s own experience on the Damascus Road opened up the way for his being ‘justified by faith’ but at the same time his being transformed in his relationship not only with God but in his horizontal relationships with others. Paul’s gospel does not begin or end with individuals but with God’s cosmic in-breaking into history. Conversion and justification certainly involves individuals, but as this happens, so the individual is ushered into the global movement of a new community life. The door is now open for the seeking and expression of justice, reconciliation and peace on the horizontal level, made possible by our experience of God’s grace on the vertical level. The gospel brings new creation in Christ, seen in new life and new relationships that break down old barriers, as people globally are drawn together to love, worship and serve Israel’s God. This is ***very different*** from being conquered by an Empire to serve *its* interests!

The Empire had actually suppressed ‘the knowledge of God’, as is clear from Romans 1. Vice, corruption, perversion and exploitation were rampant in the slums of Rome and we must remember that Paul DID address his Romans Letter to the urban house churches in the Capital of the vast Empire. Paul’s calling was to reach the Gentile world, bringing people to the obedience that comes from faith (Rom 1:5) so that all nations will come to believe and obey the true God (Rom 16:26-27). Romans is a deeply missional letter, revealing the glory of the gospel of Christ yet at the same time maintaining a stress on God’s righteous judgement. A gospel of mercy and judgement. A gospel of immense power, through the redemption rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ, in order to raise new life through new creation here and now.

The credibility of that gospel was to be seen in the communal faith and life of Christian Communities. The churches HAD to demonstrate unity, love, brotherhood and equality in an Empire that desperately lacked those four ingredients – see 1 Thess 3:8-9 in contrast to 1 Cor 5:11-12. The reality of the power of the cross to unite Jew and Gentile in CHRIST (Eph 2:11-18) visibly demonstrated the power of the cross to produce VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL RECONCILIATION AND PEACE. Paul even interrupted his final mission to Spain to ACTIVATE THE GENTILE GIVING TO

THE POOR JEWISH FOLLOWERS OF JESUS IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH – see Romans 15:25-28; Gal 2:1-10; 2 Cor 8-9. This was the acid test of the power of Paul’s gospel of the love of Christ to break down old barriers, to show true unity and to generate a universal act of worship to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This gospel of Generosity through GIVING continues to challenge the universal consumerist society and Church that increasingly dominates the entire globe in the early 21st Century. So often today, the opportunity for the gospel to demonstrate the breaking down of barriers and the uniting of fractured societies lies in the hands of the Church in the poorer non-Western world. That Church is making strides towards the reconciliation and transformation of a broken world through the gospel of the grace and righteousness of God. After all, it is God’s goal to bring ‘all the nations’ to the praise, worship and glory of God (Rom 15:11).

Our calling as Christian communities and individuals is to live out a faith that is rooted in, and reflective of, the paradox of God’s ‘weakness’ in the suffering and death of his Son, yet followed by the power of God displayed in the resurrection of Christ. That faith is not to depend on human wisdom, but on God’s power. (1 Cor 2:5) Paul’s gospel is truly cosmic - for a desperately needy cosmos. The powers HAVE BEEN DISARMED AND DEFEATED BY CHRIST. Millions today suffer poverty, hunger and massive injustice and inequality, forced to live in situations of violence and oppression. Meanwhile the wealthy and privileged, backed by supportive political systems and bathing in the profits of global consumerism, try to convince us that we really are moving towards a time of universal happiness and fulfillment for all! Secularism wants to see religion relegated into the private realm and into the territory of the individual soul. The cosmic reach of the gospel has largely been hidden and masked by the subtle workings of the powers of darkness that have massively influenced and deceived Christian believers today. Western society desperately needs to be critiqued from the perspective of the gospel.

Far from the biblical gospel needing to be demythologized, on the contrary the real need is for the Church to wake up to the reality of the corrupting influence of the ‘powers of darkness’ on social, religious and political structures, turning them into evil, dangerous and self-interested entities that bring the cosmos into deeper and deeper bondage.

Why has 2 Corinthians been relatively neglected and sidelined in ministry? The reality is that true gospel ministry is immensely powerful, effective and life-changing. The ‘underside’ of such reality, however, is that such ministry is virtually guaranteed to trigger misunderstanding, opposition and assault. Even the most humble, godly and wise ministers will find themselves under attack, at times debilitating, ferocious and capable of stretching us to our limits and to a sense of near-despair over life and ministry. The enemy never ever tires (2:11). The opposition will often feel personal and the temptation is to react either by responding with equal brutality to those who criticize us or by retreating into a shell called ‘self-pity’ or the quiet parading of all that we’ve sacrificed over the years for the sake of Christian ministry! Paul in 2 Cor stayed VULNERABLE THROUGHOUT but did respond by patient argument, explaining his circumstances, exposition of Scripture, direct appeal, touches of humour and use of irony. Seldom did he actually name the people who had caused him trouble! His sheer vulnerability was liable to be misunderstood and he had to walk a tightrope line between human weakness and spiritual power.

Some ministers are so serious about their office, status and authority that they rule virtually like dictators, demanding their own way in all church matters and making life miserable for any who stand in their way! Others veer so much in the other direction that they remain tight-lipped in the presence of congregational sin, maintain strict non-intervention where discipline is called for and simply fail to lead! The difficult blend of weakness and strength is the real challenge for us. In a strange and somewhat mysterious way, only those who in their life and ministry have received the ‘sentence of death’ (1:9) can dare to be judge over others, whilst only those who have been hurt, wounded and almost crushed can be a channel of healing to the needy, the desperate and the crying in this world. Ultimately God ‘needs’ our weakness more than our strength. Only in union with Christ, empowered by His Spirit and in our own weakness can we glorify God.

Suggested Outlines for 15 Sermons

with applications of 2 Corinthians in the contemporary world

Sermon 1 2 Cor 1:1-11 Key themes in 2 Corinthians

In the first half of Chapter One, Paul opens up a number of key themes which he then develops again in different parts of 2 Cor. Each has major application today.

a) Restoring Fractured Relationships.

This theme appears also in 1:12-2:11; 2:14-7:4 and 10-13. Remarkable that Paul could dare to call the Corinthian Church the ‘Church of God’ (1:1) in the midst of all its divisions and fractured life!! New life and renewed relationships are rooted in the GRACE AND PEACE that come from God Himself (1:2). Paul seems here to be using the idea of RECIPROCITY to bolster his argument for unity between himself and the congregation – God comforts the suffering Paul and this benefits the Corinthians (1:6), whilst at the same time, their prayer for him produces his deliverance (1:11). A ‘CIRCLE OF COMFORT’ is set up in all this – God comforted Paul through the ministry of Titus; the Corinthians had comforted Titus (7:6-7); Paul could therefore comfort the Corinthians plus other churches with God’s comfort; Paul’s Severe Letter had hurt the Corinthians, so Paul can now comfort the Corinthians. So the ‘CYCLE OF ENCOURAGEMENT’ spins on. It is not only that we, out of our own experience of suffering, are in a strong position to IDENTIFY with, and comfort, others in their suffering. This mechanism also produces UNITY and LOVE in a church and society of hurting people who are struggling with postmodern ISOLATION, INDIVIDUALISM and INTENSE LONELINESS. The deep ministry of encouragement is rare now.

b) The Character of God

God brings comfort to His suffering and afflicted people – 1:4; God has power to raise the dead and deliver His people both within and out of the struggles of life – 1:9-10; God merits our response of praise and thanksgiving because of His character – 1:3,11; God is faithful to the Church as that Church preaches Christ and experiences the help of His

Spirit – 1:18,19,22 – see also 3:17-18. DETAIL – Paul has actually adapted a Pharisaic Benediction to produce 1:3-7 in which the Judaizing influence of the false apostles is challenged by the revelation of God as FATHER of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

c) Suffering Among the Lord's People.

Alongside Paul's recognition of the reality of suffering for Christian people, he also affirms the positives of suffering – a widespread harvest of compassion – 1:4-5; mutual encouragement among believers – 1:6-7; the growth of patient endurance in suffering – 1:6; the lesson of deeper dependence on the Lord God Himself – 1:9; evidence of divine power to deliver us – 1:10; strengthening of our Christian hope – 1:9-10; witness of God's grace in answered prayer. DETAIL – Because we share in CHRIST'S suffering, the comfort of God Himself flows into us and Christ extends that comfort into others' lives. 'Comfort' = 'encouragement' or 'consolation'. In verse 4 God comforts Paul and Paul comforts the Corinthians. Suffering is inseparable from ministry, lifestyle and Gospel message. Paul's and the Corinthians' sharing of the same 'ministry pain' puts them on a level playing field and his pain enabled the gospel and salvation to reach them. Are WE today ready to be vulnerable?

Sermon 2 2 Cor 1:12-2:11 It's all about relationships in the church!

a) The Basis Of All Paul's Life And Ministry.

Paul begins in 1:12-14 by addressing the grumbles and murmurings that would have been circulating among the Corinthians that he was insincere, inconsistent and unpredictable i.e. that his writing, his speech and his actions were out of sync. He had planned and promised a visit to them but the plan had changed! He assures them that he had always been 'simple' and 'sincere', rooted in the grace and power of God. They were the fruit of his work, yielding mutual love/respect.

b) 1:15-2:4 A Change of Plan

Paul, it seems, had planned to go to Corinth and then to Macedonia. After that he would travel from Macedonia back to Corinth and then on to Judaea. He failed to make the second visit! The apostle

underlines the truth that God never fails in HIS promises and in Christ there is never ambiguity. God Himself enables Paul, the church and all believers to exercise faith and faithfulness by anointing us (1:21), setting His seal of ownership on us (1:22), putting His Spirit in our hearts (1:22) and guaranteeing what is to come (1:22). God enables conversion, faith, baptism, reception of the Spirit, resurrection into new life, both here and in the life of the age to come. Paul then affirms that his failure to pay the Corinthians a second visit was actually deliberate because he knew the visit would lead to grief for all concerned and Paul wanted to avoid that! The apostle wanted to be a constructive encourager, not a spiritual dictator, and he is constantly striving to build joyful faith. Paul had already made a visit somewhere between 1 and 2 Corinthians which caused him great pain – see 2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:9,12; 10:10. He didn't want to repeat the anguish of that stressful visit, followed by his extremely 'Painful Letter' to them. His presence in Corinth on a second visit would have caused problems for the person who had previously offended him and Paul wanted to avoid that. It seems that the church had failed to support Paul. Paul had probably been in an impossible situation whether he had visited or cancelled!! Thus Paul pleads their trust in him on the grounds that he ALWAYS makes plans by prioritizing God and Gospel.

c) Paul responds to fractured relations in the church

This could refer to one of Paul's opponents having insulted him or abused Paul's apostolic authority. It could refer to the case of the man caught in an incestuous relationship (1 Cor 5:5). It could be an independent and individualistic 'go-getter' or 'mover and shaker' – perhaps one of the false apostles or an over-ambitious leader - who had challenged Paul's position. Paul believes the rebuke/reproof of the offender has been sufficient and restoration/peace must now be sought and maintained. Paul has urged forgiveness, love, restoration and church-upbuilding FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHURCH. He forgives and forgets and frees himself from the pain of being criticized. Not only that, but Satan would win if the church had failed to discipline at all OR the person had lost heart and fallen from faith OR the Corinthians had refused to forgive and restore the person, once the matter had been dealt with! A tricky tightrope walk for Paul.... and the church! A tricky balancing act in which the Corinthians needed to affirm TRUST in Paul! Real power in the Church is the POWER OF LOVE.

Sermon 3 2 Cor 2:12-3:6 Confident and competent because of the divine Trinity alone: essentials in the life and ministry of a pastor.

a) Sheer Vulnerability.

Paul was desperately awaiting news from Titus on the latter's return from Corinth. How were the believers, following Paul's painful visit and letter of tears? Here is a great opportunity for the gospel (vv 12-13) but Paul is pre-occupied and in a state of emotional turmoil. Anxiety over the Corinthian Church, and its being led astray by the false apostles, is crushing his spirit. The apostle is torn between PEOPLE AND PLANS and Satan seeks to deflect him. This gospel opportunity is lost, yet God knows and understands our human limitation.

b) Suffering and Apparent Failure.

Paul had lived as an enemy of God but God had conquered him on the Damascus Road and now leads him as a 'slave of Christ' ultimately towards his death in Christ, so that Paul can reveal the power and glory of God. Yet in this life, Paul and his workers are BEING led in the Roman triumphal procession as 'defeated' soldiers, dragged along in pain, anguish and humiliation in order to bring glory to the conquering Emperor.

What is ACTUALLY happening is that by this suffering, Paul is spreading the knowledge of Christ. Such saving knowledge will turn people either to life or to death – no middle ground here. God is able to overcome and use for His glory our ministerial weaknesses and in effectiveness. God was able to handle Paul's anxiety and ultimately did not have to depend on Paul's ability or stability in order to perform and complete His work in and through the gospel. Only God Himself in the Trinity is equal to such a task (v. 16). Jim Elliot – 'Father, make me a crisis man. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road. Make me a fork, that men must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me'. Verse 17 shows just how our speaking sincerely 'before God' means that our lives are continually open to God and the truth of our message will be visible in us and to others! Cf. the false teachers who were triumphalist in tone (v. 14), seeing themselves as competent (v. 16), trying to impress (v. 14) and having the right credentials (3:1-3).

c) 3:1-6 Spirit-Filled From God Himself

Some false apostles were claiming that Paul's lack of supportive letters was evidence of his unsuitability for ministry! Indeed, it seems that some of the deceiving intruders into Corinth were suggesting that Paul had written his own false letters of recommendation for himself! Paul's response was that the very existence and growth of the church in Corinth was evidence of the Spirit's work in and through Paul and his co-workers. He didn't need any human letters. This clear evidence was there for all to see. Evangelism is not just about giving out tracts! The evidence of the Spirit's work lies in CHANGED LIVES. Likewise our competence for ministry comes from the Spirit (3:5 cf. 1 Cor 15:9 and 1 Tim 1:15). The New Covenant is an internal power, not an external code. The Old Covenant kills because it makes external demands without giving the inward power to obey. The New Covenant gives life because it is at work internally to change a person's nature (Eph 4:24). It is this New Covenant that the apostle explains in depth & detail in 3:7-7:4. Jesus' death and rising unleashed the SPIRIT!

Sermon 4 2 Cor 3:7-18 New covenant ministry and ministers – glory, spirit and freedom

a) 3:7-11 Ministry

It seems that a number of Paul's opponents in Corinth had allegiance to Moses and the Law. Paul argues that if the Old Covenant glory was great, even though the law was transient and temporary, then how much greater was the New Covenant's unfading and permanent glory! The Old brought a legal relationship that produced death – the penalty for law-breaking (v.7) – and condemnation (v. 9), whilst the New conveyed a familial relationship that yields Spirit (v. 8) and Righteousness – the state of being declared innocent or acquitted (v.9). 'When the sun has risen, the lamps cease to be of use'. The Old has been eclipsed by the New! Paul wants to celebrate the glory of the New Covenant and the privilege of living and working as a true apostle of the Christ, as the Spirit brings life and vindication instead of death and condemnation! How easy it is to lose sight of this glory when our lives and ministries might seem to be adrift and apparently not bearing much fruit.

b) 3:12-18 Ministers

God fulfilled His promises to His people Israel THROUGH HIS CHRIST, THE MESSIAH. It may be that Paul was being accused of gospel arrogance and a failure to be successful among the Jews. Paul responds by arguing that New Covenant Ministers can indeed be ‘very bold’ (v.12) and very open (v.13). These verses are actually a commentary on Exod 34:29-35 and Paul is thinking not only of the fading glory of Moses’ face, but the eclipse of Mosaic ministry. The reading of the Law did, and still does, produce a dulling and sluggishness of the mind. A veil hung over the Old Covenant and another veil (v.14) hangs over the heart and mind (v. 15). For the Jew, the ‘heart’ was the focus and centre of spiritual and intellectual activity, but the Jews could not grasp the truth of salvation history. Paul moves from the idea of Moses taking away the veil when he spoke to God in the tent of meeting to the truth that ANYONE who turns to the Lord – who is the Spirit (v. 17) - will experience the removal of the veil by the very work of that Spirit! Such a person is SET FREE – from death (Rom 8:2), from sin (Rom 6:18,22), from the law (Gal 5:1-3) and from condemnation (Rom 8:1)

As ministers of the New Covenant, in contrast to Moses, leave their faces unveiled, so they reflect God’s glory! Whereas the Israelites had to be prevented from viewing the glory, Paul lived and ministered with an openness in the gospel that allowed people to see the glory. Paul longed to make his message as open and clear as he possibly could. As we reflect knowledge of God into the world, so the inner transformation of lives takes place. The Spirit brings understanding about the transient nature of the Old Covenant and gives/validates the ‘unveiled’ truth of the gospel, through the lives and ministries of the new covenant ministers (3:2,18)! This glory comes from the LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT, not from a DEATH-YIELDING LETTER (3:6-11). The veil was needed because of the hardness of heart of the people of Israel but Paul speaks OPENLY and without any kind of cover of secrecy or rhetorical deception. It is the Spirit’s work to soften hearts, to heal, to change people and to bring new life ie to give glory! This glory can be seen and recognized by faith in those who have been set free. We are agents in this!

Sermon 5 2 Cor 4:1-5:10 Reasons from God not to lose heart and not to give up ministry

4:1,16a 'Therefore, we do not lose heart'

5:6, 'Therefore, we are always confident'

a) 4:1-6 Ministry from Start to Finish is by God's Mercy and Grace

This ministry is that of the 'Lord, who is the Spirit' (3:18). The key for Paul is that he does not have hidden motives, he does not use deception and he rejects any misuse of God's Word. On the contrary, the apostle proclaims the Word PLAINLY (4:2) and that is how God by the Spirit transforms both himself and all believers. Satan works on the human mind to keep it in a state of darkness, ignorance and unbelief about gospel truth (4:4-6) and this is painful and discouraging to watch. The world left to itself cannot understand divine power and glory, nor can it grasp the wisdom of the Cross, nor can it fathom why on earth Paul/his workers/his churches/ourselves are called to weakness and suffering! Our calling is to play our part - to preach Christ crucified and live obediently and sacrificially to His glory, not to exhibit our own pride, boasting, egocentricity, personality cult or entertainment. God will honour authentic and genuine ministry. No true transformation can occur without Christ (3:18) and this is exactly what happens when God 'gives us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ'(4:6). A brilliant reason not to lose heart as we preach.

b) 4:7-15 Ministry Carried Out In Our Own Frailty And Weakness Will Be Empowered And Sustained By God Himself

Suffering actually is part of God's intentional design for our gospel ministry. Paul challenges those who boasted only of their own supposed 'strengths'. The jar of clay is easily damaged, chipped and broken but the gospel message, light and power contained within it is totally safe and untouchable. Indeed, this power is what sustains us in life and ministry. We are repeatedly knocked down but not actually knocked out (4:8-9). Our own weakness in the hands of a powerful God becomes part of that 'foolish' message of Christ's death as a crucified Messiah. It is our suffering that continues to reveal God's saving activity (4:10-12). Believing-speaking-suffering is inescapable for believers. Our suffering, like Paul's, is more

bearable BECAUSE God's power is more visible in our pain and is therefore more effective, bringing new life to others by divine grace and mercy. Paul will go on to suffer/speak the truth, without giving up, since many will be reached, thanks be raised and glory will go to God (4:13-15).

c) 4:16-5:10 Ministry Is Glorious Because Eternal Glory Is Sure

Paul, like ourselves, is outwardly wasting away and heading towards death, but inwardly, invisibly and secretly, he is being renewed and moving towards glory. In his suffering he is sharing Christ's death and receiving new life. This needs the exercise of faith, outside of our sight. Paul is 'living out' the death of Christ – suffering and affliction – in order to experience the new life of resurrection here and now and later the weight of glory God is working in him and for him. That's why he doesn't lose heart! In 5:1-10, Paul longs for final redemption in a new heavenly body for this is God's ultimate purpose for us (5:4-5). Free at last from earthly affliction. The Spirit guarantees glory - by His grace, but Paul does also warn that believers will be judged by Christ on their works. (5:10).

Sermon 6 2 Cor 5:11-6:2 The ministry God has given us – reconciliation

a) 5:11-13. Our Own Discipleship Is The Foundation Of Our Ministry.

Paul longs to please Christ through his journey of walking by faith and his goal is to persuade others to do the same, grounded in the revelation of Christ as Judge. This ministry of Paul is 'plain to God' (4:2; 5:11) because of his call, his preaching of Christ, the integrity of his life, his suffering and the work of the Spirit in and through Paul. The apostle wanted to underline the AUTHENTICITY of his ministry by underlining its characteristics to the Corinthians, so that they could explain this to those Corinthians and false apostles who simply could/would not accept it. In v. 13 there is an explanatory word 'for' – if Paul is out of his mind, this may refer to his ecstatic experiences/visions, but he is always in his 'right mind' when he focuses on teaching and preaching to build up his churches.

b) 5:14-15. The Great Reversal in Paul's Life and Thought

The death and resurrection of Christ has given Paul a 'right-minded' view of life. Christ set aside his glory in order to reconcile. Paul has therefore now set aside his own interests in order to serve Christ and His Church. Our ministry now is driven by the LOVE OF CHRIST and it takes the form and nature of our PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION. As we have died with Christ to our old way of life under the power of sin, so we are now raised to a new life in Him under the power of the Spirit.

c) 5:16-6:2. The Nature of Reconciliation.

In v. 16 Paul had once ridiculed the idea of a 'crucified Messiah' and saw Christ's death as a curse from God on his own sin (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). It may be that in a similar way, Paul's opponents were thinking in a worldly way eg. that Paul's whole ministry was invalid because he suffered so much, lacked power and was deficient in status. Hence they hopelessly misjudged Paul. Verse 17 states how the New Covenant has brought about the NEW CREATION – already but not yet fully consummated!

This is seen in profound moral change that comes from the Spirit of God as we are reconciled with God. It is all from God because Christ's death is a substitutionary sacrifice for sin – see the stunningly humbling verse 21! Christ takes on OUR sin and we take on HIS righteousness. Christ's atoning death yields a new creation because it enables God not to count sin against us and at the same time enables the Spirit to live in us without destroying us (2 Cor 3:7-18). This message and ministry of reconciliation has been put into human hands – Paul's, his workers' and ours'. Paul in 6:1-2 can thus urge the Corinthians to respond to grace and live a new life, which includes reconciliation not only to God but also to others, especially those who have offended us.

How are we to re-kindle our confidence in the power of the gospel? Have we lost a sense of 'sin', 'fear of God', 'judgment', 'atonement', 'hell'? Have we grasped the corporate and cosmic senses of 'reconciliation'?

How should the Church express the LOVE OF CHRIST (5:14)? – how do we care for all people? Texting? Writing an E Mail? Costlier will be our offering of practical help and our giving of time to provide a personal, living presence alongside those in real need. Because of the gospel, we all as ministers are called to embody in our own lives the faithfulness of God.

Sermon 7 2 Cor 6:3-7:1 Reconciliation in practice: more key qualifications for ministry.

a) 6:3-10 Acid Tests For Ministry: Struggle and Perseverance

Paul lists 9 struggles in vv. 4c-5, followed by 8 divine graces to sustain us in vv. 6-7a! He compares his inner reality in vv. 8b-10 with the way some perceived him! Paul's apostolic ministry was validated by his deep affliction, pain and suffering. Like Jesus, the Suffering Servant, Paul ENDURES PATIENTLY IN HIS SUFFERING. Paul had to cope with oppressive opposition from a hostile world, with the inevitability of suffering in service and with feeling trapped by circumstances that were beyond his control. Physical beatings, sleepless nights and exhaustion. In all this, Paul addresses stubborn minds with Holy Spirit empowering. Some criticize Paul and make false reports about him (vv. 7b-8b) but this genuine apostle still shows ethical righteousness, even under pressure. Accused of many things in vv. 8c-10, yet what really counts is God's view! Paul accepts the validity of some criticisms but the false teachers simply cannot see that Paul's living out, in a real but partial sense, the death and rising of Christ, is what actually authenticates his apostolic ministry. Those who fail to see this are probably also misunderstanding the gospel!

b) 6:11-13. Called To Be Loving, Open And Vulnerable

It was through Paul's ministry that this church was reconciled to God and thus appropriate that these Corinthians now be reconciled to Paul. 'Hearts' meant thoughts AND feelings. Many in the Corinthian Church have not treated Paul well – disloyal, immoral in living, involved in Greco-Roman cults, accusing Paul of powerlessness, toying with Jewish cults, slandering and shaming Paul, ignoring him, suggesting that Paul has refused their financial help, yet has secretly filled his own pockets from the Jerusalem Collection! Paul on the other hand loves these Corinthians and longs for them to see that his life and ministry are being shaped by the death and resurrection of Christ – and therefore authentic and legitimate. He wants the Corinthians to be open, loving, vulnerable and direct in speech.

c) 6:14-7:1. Living Holy And Authentic Lives In A Hostile World.

If the Corinthians enter compromise and syncretism with other cults, this will distance them from God AND from Paul because it would actually deny the reality of the Spirit's presence and activity among them all. Thus the theme of New Covenant of the Holy Spirit is very much still uppermost in the apostle's mind. Thus reconciliation leads to new creation which means repentance, faith, holiness by the Spirit and separation from evil. We are God's temple 6:16. Paul refers in v.15b to separation in a cultic worship context but not in social settings and relationships – see 1 Cor 5:9-10. The apostle Paul adopts a strongly pastoral position in 7:1, referring to the Corinthians as 'dear friends' and including himself in the 'let us purify ourselves'. Reason? The indicative promises of God in 6:17-18 MUST lead to the imperative of holistic and holy Christian living in 7:1. We belong to God and MUST therefore separate from Gentile cultic contamination and partnerships. In all this, we are called to seek a healthy balance – between grief and celebration. Life is not all about glory, celebration, divine provision and no troubles! Nor is it continual problem-solving and gloomy misery!

Sermon 8 2 Cor 7:2-16 Working out relationships in the church context

a) 7:2-4 Need for Mutual Love

It may well be that in vv.2-4 Paul is responding, by denying, accusations that he had wronged, ruined and defrauded the Corinthians. This had soured the church's relations with Paul and the latter assures the church that he loves them very deeply, with all good will and even to the point of death. The apostle agonized daily over all his churches, desperately wanting God's absolute best for them. Paul had full confidence in the church that gave him no end of heartaches and headaches! The apostle can thus affirm that he has joy and comfort even in painful experiences and circumstances.

b) 7:5-7 God Uses His People to Minister Comfort

Paul picks up again in 7:5 the story of 2:13 when he had been struggling inwardly and outwardly whilst waiting very anxiously for news of Corinth via Titus. The latter had reported to Paul good news of much positive response from the Corinthians, though one wonders just how much had

REALLY changed in that problematic church! Is it healthy for a minister to try to find out EVERYTHING that might be wrong in the church?! It looks as if the Corinthians had wanted Paul to visit them, but when Paul HAD made his second visit, he had been criticized and humiliated by a visiting missionary and it seems as if the Corinthians had not upheld or defended Paul! Ministry is at times a very rocky road and will produce strong and sudden mood swings. How much leaders – ministers, elders and deacons – need encouragement.

c) 7:8-12 Firm Action Produces Positive Results

The apostle had written a very strong letter to the Corinthians (the ‘Severe Letter’ of 2:4) which distressed him greatly, as well as hurting the Corinthians. However, this letter had led to genuine and sorrowful repentance from the church. Rather than producing anger or resentment, this has led the church to deal with the issue of that previous attack on Paul that had insulted the apostle by challenging his position and authority. The Corinthians now realized afresh the depth of Paul’s love for them and their own indebtedness to the apostle. Paul was relieved at Titus’ report to see evidence of their repentance and spiritual progress, whilst the Corinthians were relieved that Paul was not going to be furious with them! An example of godly sorrow leading to repentance is that of Peter (7:10) in his tears and desire to follow Jesus seriously. A cause eventually for great rejoicing! Judas on the other hand had betrayed Jesus and his worldly sorrow led him to throw away his ‘wages’ at the feet of the chief priests before he took his own life! Two types of sadness with very different outcomes! The Corinthians had indeed been hurt by Paul’s strong words but the effect was to sort out their communal life and put their support behind the apostle.

d) 7:13-16 The End Result – Encouragement all Round

Titus was impressed with the Corinthians – at least for the moment – and was able to move the Jerusalem Collection forward. Paul’s positive description of the Corinthians to Titus had proved correct during Titus’s visit. Everyone has been encouraged and Paul feels that he and the Corinthians are now ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’ re the apostle’s gospel mission and message. Ultimate encouragement for Paul lies in this gospel truth, in the Word of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians HAD been led astray but are back!

Sermon 9 2 Cor 8:1-15 An acid test of spirituality: activating the grace of giving

The trigger for the Jerusalem Collection, raised by Gentile Churches was the severe famine during the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54), which put enormous economic strain on the already poor Judean believers in and near Jerusalem - a great opportunity to show the interdependence of all Christian believers. The project met various obstacles and took 10 years to complete (AD 46-57)!

a) 8:1-9 Paul's Strategy in 'Fundraising'

The apostle doesn't actually mention the word 'money'! Paul's main concern here is about WHAT GOD IS DOING IN HIS CHURCHES. He states his 'complete confidence' in the Corinthians s (7:16) and as he praises them in this way, he then makes his appeal – he uses their independent and competitive spirit to compare them with another generous church in poverty-stricken, but joyful, Macedonia; he uses the Corinthian stress on 'excellence' to call for them to excel in giving (8:7); he uses their fear of 'loss of face' to remind them that he has already praised them to the Macedonians (9:1-2) and to urge them not to risk the shame of visitors arriving and catching them unprepared (9:4); he uses the example/model of Christ himself re grace, giving and generosity! (8:9) Paul uses the word 'grace' 10 times in different ways in 2 Cor 8-9, starting with God and offering SOUND REASONS for Christian generosity. The Macedonians gave beyond their ability, elected to do this by free choice and showed right priorities. (8:3-5) Paul praises the Corinthian gifts in 8:7 and then immediately refers to giving as also a gift of God's grace! Paul writes very directly to the Corinthians on this potentially sensitive/explosive issue of giving. For Paul, the test is the church's need to demonstrate love and a voluntary, sacrificial, servant spirit that will enrich OTHERS. (8:8-9).

b) 8:10-12 Put your Money where your Mouth is!

The acid test in the church is not only taking the initiative to come up with the idea to help, which the Corinthians had done well, but to take ACTION and to PERSEVERE, even when obstacles arose and 'spanners were thrown into the works' that threatened to delay or prevent completion of the action!

When the Spirit of God is at work, spiritual opposition will arise. The Macedonians had completed well and Paul will use their help to apply some pressure to the Corinthian collection for the Jerusalem poor. Good intentions and promises are widespread in the church. When initial energy and enthusiasm run out, completion and fulfillment are the real tests of authentic and practical spirituality! Paul wants the largely Gentile Corinthians to realize they are part of the same church as the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem AND the latter to realize that uncircumcised Gentile believers in Corinth are also their family in Christ! Divine grace and church unity are key themes for Paul. 2 Cor 8-9 are actually deeply theological. Giving lies at the heart of the gospel itself.

c) 8:13-15 Spiritual Priorities more than Selected Percentages!

The focus is giving out of what one has i.e. out of surplus rather than out of needed income (8:14), so that equality/fairness can be achieved, by a spirit of interdependency between churches. Giving needs to be willing, voluntarily and cheerfully. The apostle doesn't want to impoverish the Corinthians but he does want to meet the Jerusalem poor's need of adequate food, clothing and shelter. This is again living out Christ's death and rising.

Sermon 10 2 Cor 8:16-9:15 Seek God's glory alone and the benefits will be truly global

a) 8:16-24 Life and Ministry are Inseparable – Honour God in Both!

Paul wanted the collection completed before his arrival so he would not be seen handling money. Titus and two unnamed individuals would oversee the completion and transportation of the money (8:23). The apostle wanted the whole process to be above suspicion (8:21 cf. 2 Cor 12:16-18). The presence of two men not directly linked with Paul's Mission would help reinforce the authenticity of the project. Church projects need very careful planning and thought, especially regarding the likely impact on people and their feelings. People watch our lives as they assess God and gospel. Paul stresses this. The supervisors were carefully chosen because of their lives – both were an honour to Christ - and the Corinthian church is called to show its love visibly (8:24).

b) 9:1-5 Paul's Strategy To Maximise the Chance of Success

Chapter 9 seems to follow on from 2 Cor 8, with the opener 'For concerning'. Paul wanted voluntary and generous giving and a completed collection. The apostle knew the human heart and didn't want to be ridiculously naïve or excessively optimistic. He is sending the reps to help ensure that all goes well and the Corinthians don't let him down in some way. He wanted to be positive regarding the Corinthian Church in his letter, but knew he would have to push, plan and cajole the church to guard against their 'dark side'!

c) 9:6-7 Personal Responsibility in Giving

Each person (emphatic position) decides the amount to be given. This is done with purposeful determination by each believer, and the giving is to be 'cheerful' (9:7).

d) 9:8-11 The Results for the Giver

We possess material and spiritual blessings by the grace and power of God. It is the Lord who thus gives us the means to give generously. We are called to be free from a craving for material possessions. As we want less, we will have more to give to others and it will be the Lord who replenishes, or even multiplies, our giving. He sets us free to 'abound in every good work' (9:8). This will maintain our righteous character AND will yield thanks to God (9:12) and prayer for our lives and ministries (9:14). Paul's stress is on GOD-DEPENDENCY. John Bunyan – "A man there was and they called him mad; the more he gave, the more he had". Paul skillfully uses OT texts to turn his readers' minds and help them feel they are PART of God's great cosmic drama.

e) 9:12 The Results for the Recipients

The poor in the Jerusalem and Judean churches would receive help with food, clothing and shelter, plus the testimony that this came with the love of Gentile, Christian Churches!

f) 9:11-12 The Results for God Himself

God receives the THANKS of all involved in the Collection. The whole aim is to honour God who enables and supplies all that we possess. Praise arises

because of the ‘obedience of their confession’ i.e. they practised the gospel, and because of their ‘generosity in sharing’. This honours all the churches involved in it.

g) 9:13-14 The Results for the Church

The giving would have broken down the suspicion of Jewish Christians towards Gentile ones. Recipients will pray for the Corinthian givers. Deeper and closer relationships will result. 9:15 is the source of it all – God’s gift of Christ and His gospel. The Collection eventually succeeded – Acts 20:3-4; 21:27-36; Rom 15:26-27, 31.

Sermon 11 2 Cor 10:1-18 Paul defends his apostolic life and ministry – getting personal!

a) 10:1-7 Dealing with the Sharp Darts of Opposition

The gift of the grace of God equips us to minister out of our own sheer weakness! Whether Paul is in their immediate presence or writing from a distance, he is the same Paul! Our people need to see our consistency. Patience and self-control yield meekness and gentleness – crucial in Christian leaders. The Corinthians have failed to see God’s power at work in Paul’s weakness. Paul is ready to defend himself in order to prevent damage to gospel and church, resulting from a different, gospel, Spirit and Jesus (11:4).

Paul may have been accused of being weak and worldly – e.g. inconsistent, causing division, not spiritually powerful, poor speaker (10:10; 11:6), not belonging to Christ (10:7), low status as tent-maker (12:12), suspected of taking money from the Jerusalem Collection (11:7-9; 12:14-18), little reference to his own visions and ecstatic experiences. His SPIRITUAL WEAPONS were – divine righteousness (6:7); the truth of the gospel in the cross (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 6:7); the knowledge of God (2:14; 4:6); prayer; divine wisdom; human weakness; holy conduct in life. He uses these divine weapons to demolish the false arguments, ideas, philosophies, worldviews, sinful actions and Satanic ensnarement of his opponents and of many of the believers. He does not want to be a ‘winner’ or to manipulate/bully his

churches or to empower/enrich himself. The Corinthians have been deceived into thinking this. The existence of the Corinthian Church is the evidence that Paul is indeed ‘in Christ’ (10:7) and is empowered by the Spirit of God in life and ministry.

b) 10:8-11 The Apostle ‘Boasts’ of his Consistency of Dealings

The issue here is HOW Paul’s divine authority is used and he never uses it for his own purposes. The apostle assures them that whatever he says by letter when absent, he will carry out when present. The power of the gospel message did not lie in any eloquent style and skill of a preacher, teacher or speaker, but rather in the KNOWLEDGE AND POWER OF GOD. Paul wants his readers to see, in a life-changing way, his authentic character in contrast to the intruders who were ‘servants’ of Satan.

c) 10:12-18 *Self-Commendation and God’s Commendation*

The false teachers had infiltrated Paul’s field of ministry and were trying to boast over PAUL’S fruit! The apostle does not boast by comparing himself with others, claiming superiority. He measures himself by what God does in him through divine power (1:21; 4:7; 5:11; 10:3-6). The intruders say Paul has no nerve when in their presence but Paul uses this sarcastically to ‘admit’ that he has no nerve to compare himself with those who commend themselves! He uses mock self-deprecation to deflate others’ boasting. The crux is that a genuine apostle LIVES OUT WHAT HE TEACHES. By contrast, the false apostles offered a dominant presence (10:1,10), shows of power (11:19-20), eloquent speech (11:20-21), grabbed full payment (11:7-11) and Jewish ancestry (11:21b-22). The key is what God has done in and through the minister. That is the Lord’s ‘standard of judgment’ rather than a geographical area. Results are God’s. In Christ, all boasting has actually been rendered null and void. The growth in Corinthian faith will advance Paul’s vision and ministry.

Sermon 12 2 Cor 11:1-21a Dealing with demonic deception inside and outwith the church

a) 11:1-6 The Source and Nature of Deception in this World

Paul temporarily adopts the mode of ‘foolish boasting’ to disarm his rivals and show the Corinthians how easily they have been deceived. The big difference is that Paul admits the foolishness of his boasting – the rivals do not! He uses irony to pretend to be less than he is in order to expose the crazy boasting of his rivals. He takes the part of a fool to help his readers grasp the wisdom of the Cross! His goal is to protect the church against the deception of Satan’s double agents (11:2-3). Paul does not want the ‘new creation’ in Corinth to turn tragically into a ‘new fall’. Paul is protecting the purity, not of Judaism, but of the Church – Christ’s bride. Human pride, combined with a tendency toward error, makes them ready targets for deception by the false teachers who have crept into the church in Corinth.

Note: Paul does not name his rivals and thus avoids the charge of retaliation. The false gospel seems to have involved certain ingredients – self-boasting, fun-poking at ‘servanthood’, lording it over others, human assessment of ministry, speech showmanship, visions, racial arrogance based on Jewish heritage. The false intruders may not have presented Christ as weak, humiliated or suffering ie a ‘Cross-less’ gospel. They probably taught the Spirit as a giver of ecstatic experiences rather than being tied to the Word as the heart of the gospel. THEIR gospel was divisive, self-seeking and self-orientated. Paul’s demanded and enabled transformation through sacrifice, suffering and serious morality. Paul’s focus was on truth and substance, not a style of flamboyant showiness cf. 2016! Paul’s focus was on KNOWLEDGE (11:6). The Spirit, not Paul, will transform.

Paul staked everything on the life-changing power of the gospel of Christ alone.

b) 11:7-15 Christ, the ‘Antidote’ to all Deception of Mind and Spirit

The apostle wanted to honour them and Christ by preaching free of charge. The Corinthians simply could not understand Paul or his gospel! They did not grasp that self-sacrifice to serve others must replace self-exaltation or that God’s power is seen in our humiliation and weakness. They, like we on 2016, have been conditioned and conformed to their own cultural norms/values that have shaped their faith and they desperately lack the knowledge of God which alone can expose those values as hollow, shallow and actually foolish. Paul’s weakness and constant humbling suffering

enriched him spiritually and qualified him to receive apostolic authority from the glorified and risen Christ. The relatively wealthy Corinthians would have been offended that Paul refused their help. This would have caused embarrassment and loss of face in their honour-orientated city. Paul (11:10-11) underlines HIS LOVE for this church. Receiving gifts in the ancient world carried the obligation to express gratitude and Paul did not want thereby to become socially and spiritually obliged to them as his patrons, though he HAD accepted help from poor Macedonia! If he had done that, he would not have been in a position to preach freely and boldly to them.

Paul very directly and bluntly labels the false apostles in 11:13-15. They had claimed darkness as being light, had lied but claimed to be telling the truth and had claimed sin to be just an alternative lifestyle – very widespread in 2016!

c) 11:16-21a Paul Adopts ‘Boasting’ To Expose Its True Stupidity

The rivals and many Corinthians did not understand weakness and humility. How frighteningly easily they accepted aggressive and authoritarian leaders, without the discernment to spot the fraud and falsity. Such deception destroys churches.

Sermon 13 2 Cor 11:21b-33 Paul starts his ‘fool’s speech’, focussed on more ‘boasting’!

a) 11:21b-29 Paul’s Weakness has its Source in his Sufferings.

The crux is that Paul’s foolishness is linked only with boasting in what his OPPONENTS boast in i.e. Jewish pedigree in 11:21b-23b and their visions/revelations in 12:1-4. The crucial issue is the OBJECT of boasting – it is Paul’s boasting in weakness that unmasks the rivals’ foolishness and falsity. Paul again picks up his theme of ‘weakness’ in a final effort to persuade those in Corinth who still have a deficient/defective view of Paul, his gospel and his ministry as being truly glorifying to God. His Jewish ‘boasting’ is invalid because it doesn’t include the vital credential of being called as apostle by the risen Christ to live out the life of Christ. Paul is able to boast in his ministry, toil and suffering because this is a boast ‘in the Lord’ as evidence of God’s grace and calling to Paul as apostle.

VARIETY OF TRIALS: physical and ministry labours, imprisonments and floggings, in danger of death experiences, ‘nakedness’ probably suggests the shame heaped on him by his trials and punishments, plus the daily pain of his scattered churches across Asia Minor. It is as if Paul is deliberately listing all his CV points in order NOT to impress an employer! His weakness is caused by his identification with those God had called him to serve and love in Christ.

b) 11:30-33 Paul’s Weakness Has Its Source In His Humiliation

Paul swears by God and Christ – evidence of his belief in God’s Sovereignty, power and authority in Christ. God’s authentication of Paul’s weakness confirmed his true apostleship. Aretas IV ruled Nabataea from 9BC to AD40 – he was father-in-law of Herod Antipas who divorced Aretas’s daughter to marry Herodias. Paul had entered Damascus in POWER to persecute Christians but exited Damascus in WEAKNESS, thereby validating him as a true apostle of weakness and suffering. The Romans struck a special medal – the *Corona Muralis (Crown of the Wall)* - awarded to the first soldier to scale the wall of any city being occupied by the Roman army. Paul had been lowered in a humble basket to flee from threats in the city! Paul boasts ONLY BECAUSE HIS APOSTOLIC LEGITIMACY WAS BEING THREATENED, along with the gospel and Church. He knows full well that his, and our, only boast is in what God has done in and through us, all the glory going to God alone. The grace of God, power of Christ and work of the Spirit are revealed IN PAUL’S WEAKNESS AND SUFFERING.

This is highly counter-cultural today – David Wells has said ‘We live in a world of self-righteousness, self-centredness, self-satisfaction, self-aggrandizement and self-promotion’. Our selfish attachments to this world are ‘more reliable, sufficient and satisfying than knowing and living for God’. We need to beware of modern management strategies, personal self-fulfilment methods, success in ministry, popularity, fame, power, ambition, trying to satisfy the felt needs and cultural desires of our churches and ‘selling’ relationships with Jesus. Most of all, we must live out what we say we believe and what we teach others! Priority must be the integrity of the gospel and its messenger, plus faithfulness to gospel.

Sermon 14 2 Cor 12:1-13 The valid and the invalid in Paul's foolish boasting

a) 12:1-6 The Foolishness of Paul's Boast of Revelations

Paul sees no value in describing his own purely private visions/revelations but does so in order to 'match' his rivals' boastings in this realm. The revelation was just prior to his first missionary journey. 3-way vision: the atmosphere, the place of the stars and the abode of God. This vision was at the highest possible level, so overwhelming an experience that Paul was not allowed by God to tell it to others! Paul stresses that what is

FAR MORE IMPORTANT is what others can see in Paul with regard to his words and deeds shown in his life and ministry (Key Verse 12:6). Our hope rests not in ecstatic experiences but rather in the truth of Christ and His Word. The Corinthians received the Spirit in a real sense through Paul's weakness – 12:5 cf. 2:14-3:3; 10:11-18.

b) 12:7-10 The Antidote to Pride in Personal Revelations

God's power and revelation comes, not through visions but through apostolic weakness. If the focus fell on Paul's visions, he himself would be exalted and uplifted, thereby discrediting and disarming the gospel. The thorn – which could be sickness, a demon, epilepsy, eye disease, speech impediment, malaria, leprosy, migraine, persecution or depression - was given by God to humble Paul in light of the great revelations and to expose him to Satan's attacks. Paul probably prayed repeatedly for removal of the thorn but it remained – so that God's grace would be experienced as sufficient in Paul's weakness and thus Christ's power would do its work. Paul's apostleship is authenticated by his perseverance in suffering for the gospel. We are to respond by seeing God's hand in the pain for He will be sufficient in the pain, will give grace sufficient and will reveal His power in our weakness. Regarding the vision, Paul had to be silent but God does allow him to glory in the divine words of 12:9. The Spirit glorifies the all-sufficiency of Christ's grace in the midst of weakness and suffering e.g. Spurgeon suffered depression, insult and prolonged physical illness but God worked greatly. Our calling and goal is the joy in suffering that shows Christ's sufficiency. We are to avoid self-pity AND the parading of all our pain. God uses our pain to reveal His grace and the 'knowledge of God'

(2:14). We are to rest patiently in His love and sovereignty. It is enough to know that God knows. Suffering from God helps us avoid self-satisfaction, self-glorying, self-assertion and self-dependence. Paul mediates God's transforming presence under the Spirit's ministry. We are called to communicate grace, humility and compassion in our lives and ministries. AUTHENTICITY is vital. It is the acid test of all Christian life

c) 12:11-13 The 'Red Herring' Of Paul's Boastfulness!

The boasting of Paul would never have been needed had the Corinthians commended him. In Paul's weakness and perseverance, the Spirit had wrought signs, the greatest of which had been the establishment of the Church. False apostles might perform counterfeit signs and wonders but could not fake the creation of true Christian compassion, genuine conversion and Church. The only way Paul treated the Corinthians as 'inferior' was by not putting financial burdens on them. He asks forgiveness for this 'wrong'. In reality, Paul was the only one who had been wronged cf. 2:5-11; 7:12.

Sermon 15 2 Cor 12:14-13:14 Paul prepares carefully for his third visit to Corinth

12:14-19 Paul as servant, not burden, to the Corinthians

Paul wants to tell this congregation that he is not merely defending himself but is wanting to build them up in the life and faith of Christ, to assure them of his deep love for them – in spite of his refusal of their proffered financial support - and to underline that he has been completely 'above board' in all his dealings with them – in contrast to his rivals! Paul had operated with complete financial integrity in his own practice and in those he had sent to Corinth. Indeed, so confident in this is the apostle that he challenges the Corinthians to even suggest otherwise! Paul has not in any way 'taken' their money, either overtly or subtly! His whole life is oriented towards God in Christ – that says it all – and rooted in THEOLOGY (12:19).

a) 12:20-13:4 Paul fears that strong action will be needed

Paul agonized over the real possibility that when he got to Corinth on his third visit, he would face the same community, divided by small-minded,

narrow-minded divisions and factionalism, with unresolved and unrepented sexual immorality issues. Yet in spite of his weakness and limitations, he WOULD deal with these issues by exercising discipline by the Spirit's power. Some in Corinth still viewed Paul as ineffectual, weak and unspiritual to the extent that they questioned whether he was a true believer! His critics wanted proof of Paul's anointing and ability (13:3). This is surely one of the ultimate criticisms of a Christian minister! Paul will next turn this very question onto the Corinthians themselves. Yes, Christ died for our sins in great weakness, but His purpose now is to empower new life that deals with sin and leaves it behind. True and deep repentance is needed before we can experience divine power in new life. The Spirit of God is SO POWERFUL THAT HE BUILT A CHURCH IN A CITY LIKE CORINTH! (13:4) Christ's death and resurrection are paralleled in Paul's death to sin and his new risen life in Christ. The Spirit is his power.

b) 13:5-10 Paul pleads with the Corinthians to test themselves

Now comes the challenge from Paul to the Corinthians to test themselves as to where they stand in Christ and in the faith. The apostle is actually being positive in his expectation of their true faith. If they 'approve' themselves, then this logically and automatically 'approves' Paul as the one through whom they believed and 'disproves' Paul's rivals. If the Corinthians are shown to be 'disproved' then this means that Paul himself is 'approved' by God. 13:7 shows how the Corinthians' moral welfare is more important than their 'approval' of Paul. 13:8 says that Paul will know the power of God in life and ministry ONLY as he shows forth in life and lip THE TRUTH OF GOD. The Corinthians will know power THROUGH Paul's weakness – 10:1;12:7,9,19,21.

c) 13:11-14 Paul asks unity/peace by God's presence/power

13:11 has the sense of 'be restored' rather than 'aim for perfection' while 'rejoice' is closer than 'goodbye'. Living in 'peace' and 'unity' is a reminder of the reality of spiritual warfare. Paul wants action, not fine-sounding intentions, wishes and resolutions. As that happens, so God will act. The Corinthians needed to be restored to the GOSPEL, experiencing the grace of Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit, as that gospel is loved out, lived out and spelled out in weakness, dependence and pain.

APPENDIX A

Dividing 2 Corinthians into study/sermon passages

Three other suggestions:

A Whole book

1) Tom Wright 36 Sessions of Short Daily Readings

Shown in: *Paul for Everyone - 2 Corinthians*, SPCK, 2014.

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| 1. | 1:1-7 | The God of All Comfort |
| 2. | 1:8-14 | Unbearably Crushed |
| 3. | 1:15-22 | Paul's Plans and God's 'Yes' |
| 4. | 1:23-2:4 | Painful Visit, Painful Letter |
| 5. | 2:5-11 | Time to Forgive |
| 6. | 2:12-17 | The Smell of Life, the Smell of Death |
| 7. | 3:1-6 | The Letter and the Spirit |
| 8. | 3:7-11 | Death and Glory |
| 9. | 3:12-18 | The Veil and the Glory |
| 10. | 4:1-6 | Light out of Darkness |
| 11. | 4:7-12 | Treasure in Earthenware Pots |
| 12. | 4:13-18 | The God of All Comfort |
| 13. | 5:1-5 | A House Waiting in the Heavens |
| 14. | 5:6-10 | The Judgment Seat of the Messiah |
| 15. | 5:11-15 | The Messiah's Love Makes Us Press On |
| 16. | 5:16-6:2 | New Creation, New Ministry |
| 17. | 6:3-13 | God's Servants at Work |
| 18. | 6:14-7:1 | Don't Be Mis-Matched |
| 19. | 7:2-10 | The God Who Comforts the Downcast |
| 20. | 7:11-16 | Our Boasting Proved True! |
| 21. | 8:1-7 | The Generosity of the Macedonian Churches |
| 22. | 8:8-15 | Copying the Generosity of the Lord Jesus |
| 23. | 8:16-24 | Paul's Companions Are on Their Way |
| 24. | 9:1-5 | Please Have the Gift Ready! |
| 25. | 9:6-15 | God Loves a Cheerful Giver |
| 26. | 10:1-11 | The Battle for the Mind |
| 27. | 10:12-18 | Boasting in the Lord |
| 28. | 11:1-6 | Super-Apostles? |
| 29. | 11:7-15 | No, They Are False Apostles! |

- 30. 11:16-21a The Boasting of a Reluctant Fool
- 31. 11:21b-33 Boasting of Weaknesses
- 32. 12:1-10 The Vision and the Thorn
- 33. 12:11-18 The Signs of a True Apostle
- 34. 12:19-13:4 What Will Happen When Paul Arrives?
- 35. 13:5-10 Test Yourselves!
- 36. 13:11-13 Grace, Love and Fellowship

2) *Greek New Testament* Fourth Revised Edition, UBS, 1993-4. 20 Divisions *2 Corinthians*

- 1:1-2 Salutation
- 1:3-11 Paul's Thanksgiving after Affliction
- 1:12-2:4 The Postponement of Paul's Visit
- 2:5-11 Forgiveness for the Offender
- 2:12-17 Paul's Anxiety and Relief
- 3:1-18 Ministers of the New Covenant
- 4:1-15 Treasure in Earthen Vessels
- 4:16-5:10 Living by Faith
- 5:11-6:13 The Ministry of Reconciliation
- 6:14-7:1 The Temple of the Living God
- 7:2-16 Paul's Joy at the Church's Repentance
- 8:1-15 Liberal Giving
- 8:16-24 Titus and his Companions
- 9:1-15 The Offering for the Saints
- 10:1-18 Paul Defends His Ministry
- 11:1-15 Paul and the False Apostles
- 11:16-33 Paul's Sufferings as an Apostle
- 12:1-10 Visions and Revelations
- 12:11-21 Paul's Concern for the Corinthian Church
- 13:1-13 Final Warnings and Greetings

B Selection

3) Don A Carson *7 Sessions for Four Chapters of 2 Corinthians*

Shown in: *From Triumphalism to Maturity – An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13*, Authentic Media Limited, 1988.

1. 10:1-6 Disobedience Versus Discipline: An Appeal for Obedient Faith.
2. 10:7-18 The Ugliness of Spiritual One-upmanship: How Not to Boast in the Lord.
3. 11:1-15 The Danger of False Apostleship: Overturning False Criteria.
4. 11:16-33 Triumphalistic Qualifications: Answering Fools According to their Folly.
5. 12:1-10 Destroying Super-spiritual Visionaries: Boasting in Weakness.
6. 12:11-21 Open Rebuke: The Failures of the Corinthians and the Motives of the Apostle.
7. 13:1-14 Warning and Prayer: Aiming for Maturity.

D. NEWTON 2016

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