

Preachers' Gatherings 2016

**Preaching
2nd Corinthians**

An Overview

with

Suggested Sermon Outlines

Derek Newton

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Suggested Sermon Outlines

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Table of Contents

Click on Page Number

| | |
|--|-----------|
| An Overview of 2 Corinthians | 4 |
| <i>A Survival Manual For Christian Workers.....</i> | <i>4</i> |
| Issues in 1st Corinthians as background to 2nd Corinthians | 11 |
| <i>The Condition and Struggles of the Corinthian Church that led to Paul's First Corinthian Letter....</i> | <i>11</i> |
| The Challenges of Gospel Ministry in Corinth | 12 |
| MAP of first century major cities and churches | 13 |
| Paul's Main Concerns and Themes in 2 Corinthians | 14 |
| <i>Key issues that emerge in the course of this letter:.....</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>How does Paul define, and deal with, each term in 2 Corinthians?</i> | <i>15</i> |
| Corinth - City, Church and Letters: An Introduction | 17 |
| <i>Corinth in Paul's Time: Background and Historical Setting.....</i> | <i>17</i> |
| <i>Chronology of Letters and Visits.....</i> | <i>18</i> |
| <i>Authorship, Date and Location of 2 Corinthians.....</i> | <i>20</i> |
| Corinthian Mind-Sets: The Root of the Problem | 21 |
| <i>Religious Ritual and Thought</i> | <i>21</i> |
| <i>The heart of the problem in Corinth.....</i> | <i>22</i> |
| <i>The Features of the Problem of 'Gospel Ignorance' in Corinth.....</i> | <i>24</i> |
| Sample Sermon: | 37 |
| <i>Our resources for global mission 2 Cor 2:12 - 3:6; 10:3-5</i> | <i>37</i> |
| The Nature of the Gospel Paul had embraced | 42 |
| Suggested Outlines for 15 Sermons | 46 |
| <i>Sermon 1 2 Cor 1:1-11 Key themes in 2 Corinthians.....</i> | <i>46</i> |
| <i>Sermon 2 2 Cor 1:12-2:11 It's all about relationships in the church!.....</i> | <i>48</i> |
| <i>Sermon 3 2 Cor 2:12-3:6 Confident and competent because of the divine Trinity alone:</i> | <i>50</i> |
| <i>essentials in the life and ministry of a pastor.....</i> | <i>50</i> |
| <i>Sermon 4 2 Cor 3:7-18 New covenant ministry and ministers: glory, spirit and freedom.....</i> | <i>52</i> |
| <i>Sermon 5 2 Cor 4:1-5:10 Reasons from God not to lose heart and not to give up ministry.....</i> | <i>54</i> |
| <i>Sermon 6 2 Cor 5:11-6:2 The ministry God has given us – reconciliation</i> | <i>56</i> |
| <i>Sermon 7 2 Cor 6:3-7:1 Reconciliation in practice: more key qualifications for ministry.....</i> | <i>58</i> |
| <i>Sermon 8 2 Cor 7:2-16 Working out relationships in the church context</i> | <i>60</i> |
| <i>Sermon 9 2 Cor 8:1-15 An acid test of spirituality: activating the grace of giving</i> | <i>62</i> |
| <i>Sermon 10 2 Cor 8:16-9:15 Seek God's glory alone and the benefits will be truly global.....</i> | <i>64</i> |
| <i>Sermon 11 2 Cor 10:1-18 Paul defends his apostolic life and ministry – getting personal!.....</i> | <i>66</i> |
| <i>Sermon 12 2 Cor 11:1-21a Dealing with demonic deception inside and outwith the church.....</i> | <i>68</i> |
| <i>Sermon 13 2 Cor 11:21b-33 Paul starts his 'fool's speech', focussed on more 'boasting'!.....</i> | <i>70</i> |
| <i>Sermon 14 2 Cor 12:1-13 The valid and the in-valid in Paul's foolish boasting</i> | <i>72</i> |
| <i>Sermon 15 2 Cor 12:14-13:14 Paul prepares carefully for his third visit to Corinth</i> | <i>74</i> |
| Dividing 2 Corinthians into study/sermon passages | 76 |
| <i>Three other suggestions:</i> | <i>76</i> |
| Bibliography: 2 Corinthians | 79 |

An Overview of 2 Corinthians

A Survival Manual For Christian Workers

1:1-12

Paul briefly, but very strongly, outlines the depth of their struggles in the province of Asia and their sense of despair in the pain of the task of World Mission. Yet he remains hugely confident that it is all worthwhile because – our pain is the divine mechanism by which comfort flows out to others; our pain is God's way of making us rely utterly on God Himself; our pain becomes an opportunity for God to show His power to deliver and to go on delivering; our pain triggers prayer which yields a demonstration of God's grace, gratitude for that grace and thus glory is given to God. Paul affirms, in v. 12, that he and his fellow workers have acted in their relating to the Corinthians, as well as in their living in the world, out of the grace, holiness and sincerity that come from God.

1:13-2:11

In our communication with you, we want you to understand fully what we are saying to you, so that you will boast of us just as we will boast of you in that final day – vv. 13-14. I planned to see you twice – on my way to Macedonia and then back from there. Just as this was a definite plan, so my message to you is definite and rooted in the Christ whose promises are always 'Yes'. He is faithful v.18. God has anointed us all, sealed us by His Spirit as His own and set his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee of what is to come – vv. 21-22. Paul had written a very painful letter and made a painful visit to the church, which he doesn't want to repeat. He simply wants them to know of his great love for them – 2:4. He wants to work towards the strengthening, not destruction, of their faith. Paul urges the Corinthians to forgive the offender having dealt with that person over the grief he has caused the church – 2:5. Affirm your love for him. Failure to forgive can provide an opportunity for Satan to intervene in a church's life and ministry – 2:11.

2:12-3:6

The apostle had gone to Troas to take up a God-given chance for the Gospel but he failed to find Titus there and so he passed on to Macedonia – 2:13-14. Through our lives, God spreads the *knowledge* and *fragrance* of Christ, which brings salvation and judgment. Who is capable of such a task?! As ministers sent from God, we speak with sincerity – 2:17. YOU, Corinthians, are the evidence of the work of the Spirit (3:1-3) written on our hearts – a letter from Christ, visible to all. The only competence we have is that which comes from

Christ such that we are now ministers of a new covenant of the life-giving Spirit of Christ.

3:7-18

The ministry in letters of stone brought death but came with glory. How much more glorious is the ministry that brings life and righteousness – 3:7-11 – lasting glory. Such a hope makes us bold. Moses veiled his face and the veil of the Old Covenant can now only be removed in Christ. The Lord is the Spirit – vv. 14-18 – and here is freedom. It is the Lord, the Spirit, whose glory we look into and reflect and the result is transformation into Christ's likeness, with greater and greater glory.

4:1-18

We have this New Covenant ministry by God's mercy and THEREFORE we don't lose heart. We have set aside our former ways and we now proclaim the Word fully (4:1-2). Those who are perishing, and therefore blind, cannot see the truth of the Gospel. Yet we preach Christ as Lord and God has shone light into our lives, giving us knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ (4:3-6). *However*, this treasure is in jars of clay to show that the power is from God and not from us 4:7. Paul then lists his struggles in 4:8-9 which always leave him short of actually giving up and then he shows how the death of Jesus has to be borne in our bodies so that His Life can be seen in us 4:10-12. All this we believe and *therefore* we speak, knowing that the God who raised Jesus will also raise us. Because of this grace of God that is reaching so many, then many will give thanks and so God will be *glorified!* (4:14-15). *Therefore we don't lose heart.* Paul then compares outward wasting away with inner renewal v.16. Our temporary pain produces eternal glory that exceeds the pain and therefore we can fix our eyes on the unseen which is eternal – 4:17-18.

5:1-10

When our earthly life ends, we will have heavenly clothing. Meanwhile we groan in this present mortal body and life until we receive our heavenly dwelling that will equip us for life in eternity. This is God's purpose for us and we have the Spirit as a deposit, and therefore guarantee, of what is in store for us in the future – 5:2-5. *Therefore* we remain always confident but we are in the body and away from the Lord, and so we live by *faith*, not by sight. We would prefer to be with the Lord but the key issue is that we aim to please the Lord *because* we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one of us may receive our dues for what we have done while in the body – 5:6-10.

5:11-6:2

Because we fear the Lord, we seek to persuade people. We are not trying to push ourselves forward but we want you to take pride in us, thus challenging those who are concerned with outward appearances rather than what is in the heart – 5:11-12. We are compelled by Christ’s love because Christ died for all and was raised from death so that those who now live should live for Him 5:14-15. Paul stresses that we now focus on Christ and the believers’ new creation in Christ. This is all from God who has reconciled us and given to us the message and ministry of reconciliation – 5:16-19. We are now Christ’s ambassadors imploring people to be reconciled v.20. The heart of the message is that God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God – v.21. Paul and his fellow workers urge the readers not to receive divine grace in vain – 6:1 – and this is indeed the time of God’s favour and the day of salvation.

6:3-13

In 6:3 Paul states that he and his workers have put no blockages in the paths of the church or indeed anyone, so that the apostle’s ministry will not be discredited in any way. He then lists the positive elements of his servanthood – various sufferings, spiritual qualities, the Holy Spirit, sincere love, painful experiences - and yet Paul is able to remain positive in the midst of all these struggles (vv.4-10). Paul then says that he has opened his heart to the Corinthians and shown them his affection but that the Corinthians are failing to reciprocate in these regards – 6:11-13.

6:14-7:1

The apostle urges the Corinthian believers not to be yoked together with unbelievers – 6:14 – and reinforces this with a series of questions which contrast the respective worlds of these two groups eg light/darkness, Christ/Belial, temple of God/temple of idols etc. WE are the temple of the living God – 6:16. We ARE the people of God. Therefore Paul calls for separation and pleads for the Corinthians not to touch unclean things. God will then care for His children as a Father – vv 17-18. Because we have these OT promises, let us PURIFY ourselves from all that pollutes body and spirit and thus perfect holiness out of reverence for God – 7:1.

7:2-16

Paul seems to pick up from where he left off his thought back in 6:13 by writing in 7:2 that he wants the Corinthians to make room for him and his

workers in their hearts. Paul defends himself as having done nothing to offend the Corinthians but immediately assures them that he is not saying this to blame/condemn them in any way. Paul reaffirms his great love for them and joy in them - vv. 3-4. Titus had told Paul in Macedonia of the Corinthians' great concern for Paul – 7:5-7. Paul knows that his letter to the Corinthians had caused them pain but he doesn't regret that, except for a little while, because it led to godly repentance. This repentance led to definite fruit in the Corinthians' lives which fulfilled Paul's original reason for writing the letter, namely to help the Corinthians see just how devoted they were to Paul. The end result is that Paul and his workers have been encouraged and Paul is happy that his boasts to Titus about the Corinthians have been proved valid - 7:10-16. The believers have been obedient and the apostle's confidence in the Corinthians has been confirmed.

8:1-15

Paul wants to tell the Corinthians that out of the Macedonians' great suffering and poverty, God had given them grace to give generously and sacrificially, firstly to God and then to Paul. They had pleaded for the opportunity to serve the saints in this way. Paul had pressed Titus to complete the Corinthians' own act of giving by God's grace and Paul himself urges the Corinthians to do well in this 'grace of giving' – 8:1-7. Paul is not forcing them to give but is testing their sincerity by comparing them to the Macedonians! After all, we became rich by Christ's becoming poor! – vv. 8-9. God assesses our *willingness* to give from what we DO possess and Paul's goal is for equality, with the Corinthians sometimes giving to others but sometimes receiving from others – 7:10-15.

8:16-9:15

God put into the heart of Titus a deep concern for the Corinthians and Titus, plus another respected brother, will travel to the Corinthians to organise the gift. Paul is sending another person also so that the gift is administered in a healthy and 'above board' way. He wants the Corinthians to receive this party well, so that the churches can see just why Paul has so much confidence in the Corinthian Church – 8:16-24.

Paul writes that he has no need to write to them about the gift but nevertheless *does write* and says that he has been boasting to the Macedonians about the Corinthians' generosity. Indeed it was Corinthian enthusiasm that influenced most Macedonians to give! Paul nevertheless writes that he is sending the brothers to expedite the generous gift they have prepared. He wouldn't want any Macedonians to come along and find the Corinthians unprepared! 9:1-5

Alongside this challenge to give generously is Paul's call to give cheerfully and voluntarily by God's grace and provision. Sowing generously means reaping generously and vice versa and God will provide so that we can give generously and thereby the result will be thanksgiving to God. Men will praise God for the obedience and generosity of the Corinthians. It will result also in praise and prayer for the grace of God witnessed among the Corinthians in this grace of giving by the Corinthians – 9:6-15.

10:1-18

Paul appeals on the basis of the meekness and gentleness of Christ and writes that he is 'timid' in their presence but 'bold' when away from them. He refers to his intended visit and hopes he won't need to be bold with some who live by the world's standards. On the contrary, we use divine weapons for our warfare in this world, fighting against everything that is working AGAINST knowledge of God. We seek to bring our minds obedient to Christ and will punish all disobedience once your obedience is complete – 10:1-6. Paul is not ashamed of the authority he has from God to build up the Corinthians and whilst some say his letters are 'heavy' but his presence and speech are 'light', nevertheless, the apostle WILL be firm in action when he visits them – 10:7-11. Paul and his workers do not want to compare themselves with others who have commended themselves, but rather they limit themselves to their assigned field, namely the Corinthians they have impacted with the Gospel. Paul longs for the growth in faith of the Corinthians so that he can then expand his Gospel ministry beyond them. Our boast must always be in the Lord and we must remember that only those who God commends are actually and genuinely approved – 10:12-18.

11:1-15

Paul continues with some more 'foolishness' and writes of his jealousy over the Corinthians for he had promised them to Christ as a pure virgin to a husband, but he fears that they may have been deceived as Eve was and led away from Christ into a different Jesus spirit and gospel. Paul does not feel inferior to the 'super-apostles'. He may not be a trained speaker but he does have knowledge – 11:1-6. Paul asks the Corinthians whether it was wrong for him to preach the Gospel to them free of charge. After all, the Macedonians and others had supported the apostle financially in order to maintain his ministry to the Corinthians. This is not to say that Paul does not love the Corinthians. On the contrary Paul will continue his ministry so as to cut the ground from underneath those who put themselves on the same level ground

as Paul ie the false apostles who reflect Satan's operation as an 'angel of light' and who will finally be condemned – 11:7-15.

11:16-32

Paul stresses that he is not actually a fool but he is playing the part of a fool so he can boast like the world boasts. He is concerned that the Corinthians seem so easily deceived by falsity, yet he ironically calls them 'wise' and himself 'weak'! – 11:16-21. Paul continues to boast as a 'fool' by listing his Jewish qualifications which match any false apostles', as well as his sufferings and punishments, including threats from false apostles and his ongoing concern for all his churches – 11:21b-29. The apostle, if he must boast, will truly boast of the things that show his weaknesses. For example, Paul had been stranded in Damascus when King Aretas sought to arrest him, but Paul escaped in a basket lowered down the city wall – 11:30-33.

12:1-10

The apostle continues to boast – even though it gains nothing - this time regarding visions and revelations from the Lord. A man in Christ (Paul) was caught up to the third heaven 14 years ago to paradise, whether in the body or out of the body. However, Paul refuses to boast about this and will boast only of his weaknesses. Paul always speaks the truth – 12:1-6. In order to stop the apostle becoming conceited, he was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment him. Paul pleaded three times for this to be taken away but God's verdict was that His grace was enough for Paul and His power is perfected in our weakness, so Paul is glad to boast of his weaknesses. Paul is actually strong when he is weak – 12:7-10.

12:11-21

Paul admits that he may be a 'fool' and 'nothing' but he is not inferior to the 'super-apostles' and ought to have been commended by the Corinthians. He 'apologizes' for not being a burden to the Corinthians and affirms that apostolic marks – signs, wonders and miracles – had been performed among them – 12:11-13. We did not trick or deceive you in any way and all we do is out of love for you. Titus and our brother were sent to you and they did not exploit you. Paul will now visit them a third time – 12:14-18. All that Paul does and speaks in Christ is not for his own defence but rather in order to strengthen the Corinthians. He fears that there may be mutual disappointment when he arrives in Corinth and that he will find chaos and anger among the believers there, as well as many who have failed to repent of sexual immorality – 12:19-21.

13:1-14

As preparation for his third visit, Paul stresses again that all matters must be established by two or three witnesses and he promises them prompt action to deal with unrepentant sinners because some of them are challenging whether Christ is actually speaking through him. Christ died in weakness but now lives by divine power. We likewise will serve you in God's power – 13:1-4. Christ lives in every true believer, so test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. We live only in line with the truth and we are glad to be weak while you are strong. Paul does not want to be harsh in his use of the divine authority he has to build and tear down – 13:5-10. Paul calls for perfection, obedience, unity and peace and God will be present with them. Paul offers them the 'grace' – 13:11-14.

Issues in 1st Corinthians as background to 2nd Corinthians

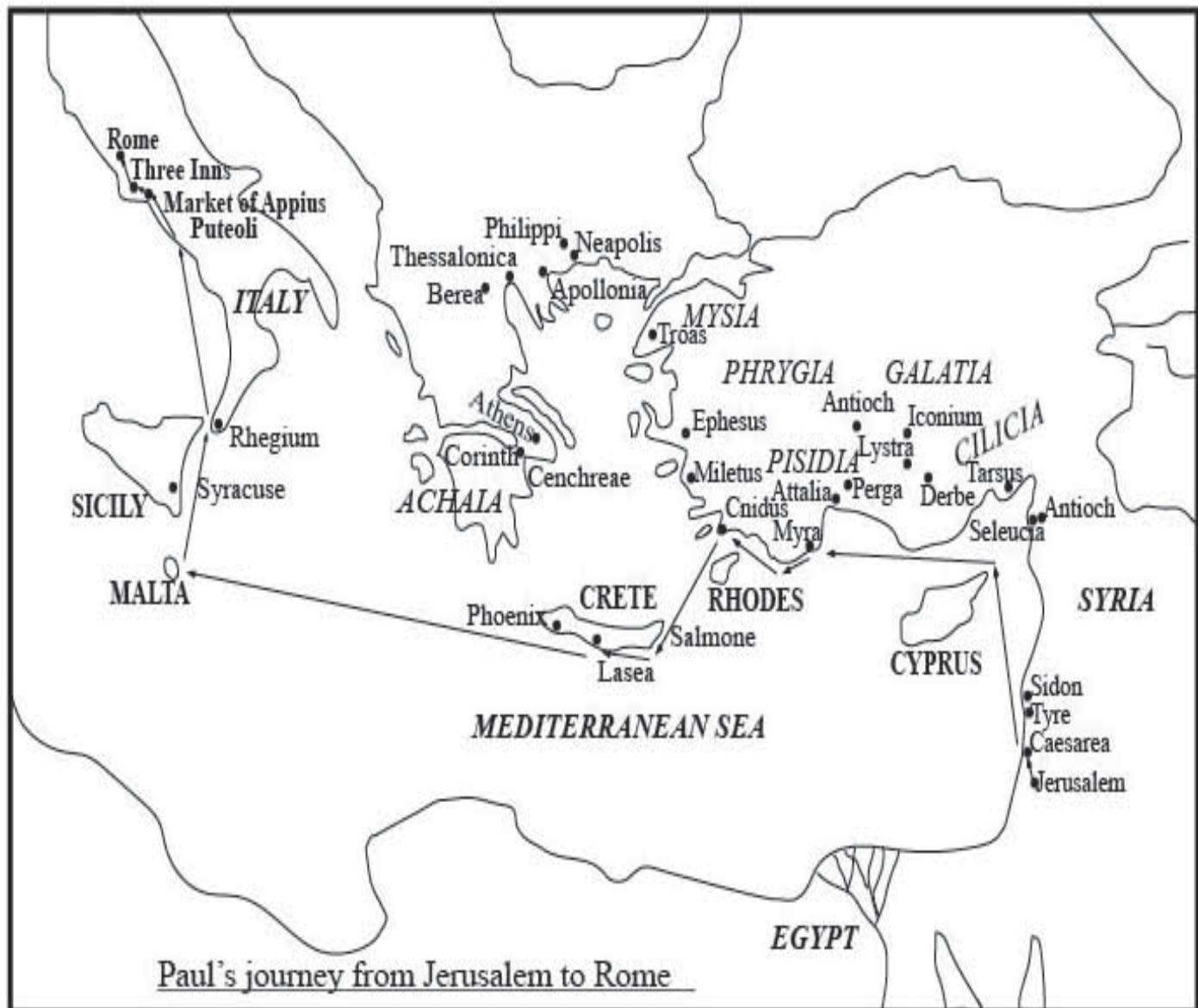
The Condition and Struggles of the Corinthian Church that led to Paul's First Corinthian Letter

1. Divisions and splits that led to the following of individual personalities, possibly linked to house group leaders. Jealousy, quarrelling and worldliness. A fractured fellowship – See 1 Cor 1:4-9 and Paul's subtle hints at the issues that will occupy him in 1 Cor as a whole, whilst thanking God for the Corinthians and maintaining his relationship with them.
2. Focus on rhetorical ability and eloquence of speech (1 Cor 2:4-5).
3. Failure to grasp the wisdom of God in the foolishness of the message of the Cross (1 Cor 1:18).
4. Pride, arrogance and boasting (1 Cor 4-5). Seeking to maintain or gain worldly honour.
5. Sexual immorality and liberal attitudes towards the use/abuse of the human body. Link to Platonic views on the centrality of the soul and low view of the importance of the 'body'. Linked to the Corinthian struggle to accept the idea of the Resurrection Body in 1 Cor 15.
6. Range of views on the issue of Christian involvement in Greco-Roman sacrificial festivals. Where are the boundaries and restrictions and how much freedom do believers have in their practices (1 Cor 8-10)?
7. Unacceptable practices in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34).
8. Lack of understanding of how the Body of Christ should be built up through the exercise of spiritual gifts. Communal significance of gifts rather than personal/individual freedom to practise those gifts (1 Cor 12-14).
9. Failure to grasp the need for orderly and appropriate worship services (1 Cor 14).
10. A Church rooted more in the norms and ways of Greco-Roman culture and religion than in a life-transforming understanding and experience of the grace of God in Christ. Wherever 'grace' and 'gospel' are not lived out, peace will be lacking or absent.

The Challenges of Gospel Ministry in Corinth

1. Fierce individualism and independence of believers in Corinth.
2. Opposition from false apostles who were influencing the Corinthians with ‘another gospel’, such that there was widespread confusion about the nature of the true gospel.
3. Entrenched behavioral patterns e.g. sexual immorality which was present before, during and after the writing of both of the Corinthian letters. Linked to the Platonic view of the relative irrelevance of the human physical body.
4. The gospel of Christ was/is so deeply counter-cultural in nature that some in Corinth, even if they understood the gospel, would nevertheless resist the gospel because they knew it would threaten their ‘status quo’, culture and comfort.
5. Human beings are generally slow to respond to any call for change, especially if it is costly.
6. Supernatural forces were/are constantly at work to keep people in a state of darkness and spiritual ignorance.
7. Cultural patterns of patron and client relationships in Corinth tended to maintain social class distinctions which the gospel was challenging.
8. The concept of ‘grace’ as the undeserved mercy and love of God in Christ was/is illogical and was/is not easily understood, whether within or across cultures. The idea that ‘grace’ must lead to ‘life transformation’ would sound very strange!
9. Humility in Greco-Roman society was considered to be a weakness to be avoided in social life and relationships.
10. The whole concept of a message, a ministry and a manifestation of Christian Reconciliation was radically new, threatening and creative of suspicion in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

MAP of first century major cities and churches



Paul's Main Concerns and Themes in 2 Corinthians

A number of major themes are introduced and developed, sometimes running parallel to each other, sometimes intersecting, throughout 2 Cor. Paul develops a theme, drops it, returns to it and extends it. Themes are interwoven and recurrent as the apostle extends his arguments throughout his letter.

Key issues that emerge in the course of this letter:

Grace

Gospel

Discipleship

Suffering

Leadership

Communication

Relationships

Perseverance

Dependence

Character

Authenticity

Church Unity

Union With Christ

How does Paul define, and deal with, each term in 2 Corinthians?

1. Divine strength and divine power are manifested in human weakness. Our call is to a deep and continuous *Dependence* on God and on the Body of Christ.
2. Christian leadership should be exercised in a spirit of *Humility, Holiness, Servanthood* and *Maturity* in order to protect and preserve the *Gospel* and the *Unity Of The Church*.
3. Paul defends and affirms the *Authenticity* of his God-given *Apostleship* in the face of endless criticisms, from inside and outside the Corinthian Church. These attacks from the false apostles and from others under their influence, called Paul's authority into question.
4. Paul seeks to help the Corinthians to see just how much and how far pagan beliefs, practices and attitudes were actually infiltrating the church and were shaping faith and behavior. Christian *Discipleship* was being stunted as a result. Paul responds to the false teachers by listing the validity and value of his highly 'counter-cultural' suffering, pain, rhetorical weakness and new covenant lifestyle to prove his authentic apostleship.
5. Pain, *Suffering* and encouragement mingle together in the 'normal' Christian life and ministry, as the *Death* and *Resurrection* of Christ are paralleled and manifested in the lives of Paul, his fellow workers and all believers down the centuries. Our pain and struggle are not interruptions to gospel life and ministry, but actually are integral to that ministry. God uses our weakness to achieve his cosmic purposes.
6. The need for *Perseverance* is deeply embedded into the 2 Corinthian letter, as in so many of the first century AD New Testament letters and Gospels. Comfort and suffering work together by the Spirit to produce *Patient Endurance*.
7. The conduct of *Personal Relationships* within the Church, especially between leaders, elders, deacons and church members are areas over which we need to be very aware of the tactics of Satan and his demonic forces, as he seeks to rip the Church apart. Channels of *Communication* need to be open, clear and founded on integrity of lifestyle. Paul was very aware of the cosmic operation of spiritual powers and would have been conscious that the phrase 'the rulers of

this world' held a double meaning in the ancient world. Not only did it refer to those who held political power in the Empire, but it also meant the invisible, evil, demonic powers that constantly sought to undermine God's purposes for nations, governments, societies, churches and individual Christian believers.

8. *Grace, generosity, and gratitude in Christian living are the results of mature theological thinking and living.* For Paul and all believers this means living out the death and resurrection of Christ *through our union with him.*
9. The full height, breadth and depth of Paul's theological thinking are woven into the biblical text of 2 Cor, along the progression from *Creation – New Creation – New Heaven and new Earth.* *The Glory Of God* Is the apostle's ultimate goal in all of his thought, belief, attitudes and practice. Paul's arguments are consistently *Christocentric* and *Holy Spirit-Centred.*
10. Paul uses all the events of his personal life – joy and agony, understanding and misunderstanding, commendation and condemnation, elation and depression – as a series of springboards to clarify just what the *revealed Gospel* actually is and how it should be lived out in society, church and world. The false apostles, and those influenced by them, have failed to understand and experience the true *Gospel of Reconciliation* and its practical outworkings. Paul's fear all along was that a defective gospel understanding would lead to a damaged, and potentially destroyed, church. His letters to the Corinthians actually were matters that impinged on *life* and *death* for the unbelievers and Christian believers, whom Paul had come to *love* with all his heart and soul.

Corinth - City, Church and Letters: An Introduction

Corinth in Paul's Time: Background and Historical Setting

When Paul visited Corinth three times between about AD 50-56, the city was officially Roman and consisted of about 30% slaves a main depot for the Aegean slave trade. It was located on a key isthmus between two harbours – Lechaeum, 2 miles north on the Corinthian Gulf and Cenchreae, 6 miles east on the Saronic Gulf. A very *strategic* location from which to launch the Gospel to a new, open and spiritually-seeking urban population. Corinth became capital of the province in 27 BC under Emperor Augustus and in AD 44 Achaia got senatorial status under the control of a proconsul. In 146 BC a Roman army had destroyed Corinth but in 44 BC Julius Caesar saw the strategic importance of Corinth and rebuilt it as a Roman colony, populated by poorer Romans of whom many were freed slaves, as well as by Syrians, Egyptians and Jews. A highly pluralistic society! The official language was Latin and the city controlled the transfer of goods across the isthmus between Italy and Asia. The Isthmian Games every two years brought in much wealth to make Corinth a prosperous and highly cosmopolitan city as visitors poured in every other spring. In a relatively new city like Corinth, the aristocracy tended to be fluid and upward social mobility was more feasible than elsewhere. This meant that status and materialism were important to the Corinthians, linked to patronage, wealth, marriage and personal connections. The upper class nobility however still tended to look down on freedmen who were trying to attain honour by other means, eg's being patrons of new cults, showing off rhetorical skills, sponsoring a statue. No doubt there were those in the church who were seeking *honour* and *status* within the church in order to attain wider recognition. Herein lies a key contextual factor for understanding 2 Corinthians!

Paul first visited Corinth in autumn AD 50, followed later by his helpers Timothy and Silvanus. He linked up with Aquila and Priscilla, expelled from Rome by Claudius in AD 49, and all three working as tentmakers. He stayed in Corinth for 18 months, working initially in the synagogue with 'God-fearers' and Jews. Titius Justus, a 'God-fearer', responded to the Gospel – Acts 18:7. Probably Stephanas responded as well at this time. Synagogue ruler, Crispus, likewise – Acts 18:8. During the second but longer phase of this 18 month period, Paul worked among the Gentiles in Corinth.

In spite of 1 Cor 1:26, there were a number of wealthy folk in the church eg's. Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2,18;Rom 16:3-5) , Gaius (Rom 16:23) who

housed the whole church, Crispus (Acts 18:8), Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16), Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2) and Erastus (Rom 16:23) – notice a good number of Roman names here, especially former slaves. There must also have been many slaves and artisans. Patronage was offered in Corinth from those who held political rank *and* at a domestic/social level from those with wealth/status. It was such patronage that Paul refused to accept, causing considerable tension. He identified with the poorer folk and refused to adopt rhetorical methods in his speaking. The houses owned by wealthier members in Corinth probably accommodated up to 50 guests and believers may have been attaching themselves to the individuals at the estimated half dozen or so house-churches. It may be that semi-independent house churches were being influenced in their theological thinking by the host/hostess and/or the guest preachers, including false teachers, who would have stayed in such houses from time to time.

Positives – Many would be attracted to the Gospel by signs, wonders, works, Paul’s preaching, community love and care, openness to receive Gentiles compared with the synagogue, theoretical lack of social boundaries and the chance of a new life in the Spirit.

Negatives – A melting pot of mixed backgrounds and social classes that would be like dynamite in triggering rivalry and discord which Paul then had to deal with repeatedly. This church in Corinth challenged Paul’s apostolic authority, ministerial qualifications and personal spirituality. This emerges clearly in 2 Cor.

Chronology of Letters and Visits

Paul planned to visit Corinth shortly after he sent them 1 Cor (1 Cor 4:18-21). His plan was to stay at Ephesus till Pentecost, then travel to Macedonia over the summer and autumn, then probably stay in Corinth over the winter of AD 55-56 (1 Cor 16:5-9).

Change of plan – Paul decided to go to Corinth twice, once on his way to Macedonia and again on his return. After that he hoped the collection for Jerusalem would be ready and he would sail with it to Palestine – 2 Cor 1:15f; 1 Cor 16:1-4.

Change of plan 2 – Paul faced a deadly peril in Asia – 2 Cor 1:8-10 – which altered his plan, as did news of trouble in Corinth. It looks from clues in 2 Cor as if the impact of 1 Cor had not been as good as the apostle had hoped and Timothy wasn't able to handle the situation well enough. This second visit – the painful one – of 2 Cor 13:2 and 2 Cor 2:1 - was indeed difficult. Paul was humiliated. His authority was challenged by at least one person and Paul backed away, probably going via Macedonia.

Paul then wrote a very severe letter (Corinthians C) to them, albeit shedding many tears as he wrote – 2 Cor 2:3f. He sent it in the hands of Titus but subsequently wondered if he'd done the wrong thing! In that letter he said he loved them but wanted reciprocal evidence by a willingness to acknowledge *His* apostolic authority and a willingness to discipline the person who had challenged his authority. He had told Titus that he was confident of a positive response from the church at Corinth. Paul then awaited a response.

Paul was very low in spirits – 2 Cor 1:8-10 - and couldn't settle down to evangelism as he awaited news from Corinth. He waited for Titus until he realized that Titus wasn't sailing directly from Corinth to Troas but rather was taking the land route through Macedonia. Thus Paul set out for Macedonia – 2 Cor 7:5. Titus then met him with good news of the Corinthians' positive response to Paul's tearful and stinging letter. Indeed they may have over-disciplined the offender in their enthusiasm to show their love and respect for Paul!!

Paul immediately sent 2 Corinthians (Corinthians D), explaining that he hadn't visited them again so as to avoid causing any more pain. He wants the Corinthians to forgive the offender now that they have shown their love for Paul and respect for his authority. He now feels, in the better atmosphere, that he can open up again the issue of the Jerusalem Collection – 2 Cor 8-9 – having temporarily dropped the subject in 1 Cor 16:1-4.

C.K.Barrett is of the opinion that the total time within which 1 Corinthians and the two parts of 2 Corinthians – chapters 1-9 and 10-13 – were written down was a period of just under 12 months.

Authorship, Date and Location of 2 Corinthians

Authorship

The Pauline authorship of Romans, 1 Cor, 2 Cor and Galatians (the '*Hauptbriefe*') is not contested. Paul is named in 1:1 and 10:1. 2 Cor appears in Marcion's Canon (c140) and Muratorian Canon (c170). Polycarp appears to know it (c110 'Letter to the Philippians') and Irenaeus is the first to quote it (c175 'Adversus Haereses 4.28.3').

Date

Difficult to be certain. Two options:

1. 2 Corinthians was written about one year after 1 Corinthians.
Reason: in 2 Cor 9:2 Paul refers to the Achaian churches' willingness since 'last year' (probably in 1 Cor 16:1) to contribute to the Collection. The latter reference is considered to be datable to the spring of AD 54, making 2 Cor late in AD 55, allowing for a painful visit, severe letter, near-death experience in Asia, evangelism in Troas and travel to Macedonia.
2. However, in Rom 15:19 Paul wrote that by the time he had visited Corinth for the third and final time in winter 56, he had already preached the gospel from Jerusalem round to Illyricum. Where does the pioneer work in the west of the Balkan peninsula fit into this? There would be little room for it from AD 54 to AD 55 – and even less if Philippians is dated in this period. Some date this Balkan evangelism after Paul's trip to Macedonia in autumn 55. If that is the case, then 2 Cor could be dated in the autumn of 56.

FF Bruce believes that if 1 Cor was sent between Passover and Pentecost of AD 55, then 2 Cor 1-9 will have been sent early in AD 56 and 2 Cor 10-13 a few weeks later. LP Pherigo feels that Paul wrote 2 Cor 10-13 after his release from the Roman imprisonment of Acts 28:30f but nothing in 2 Cor 10-13 presupposes such a situation and especially one that is so late.

Location of writing

Paul wrote 2 Cor from Macedonia – see 7:5; 8:1; 9:2. Probably from Philippi stated in a subscription. 2 Cor was then given to Titus and two church representatives, who later went with the apostle to Jerusalem with the collection funds (8:16-24).

Corinthian Mind-Sets: The Root of the Problem

Religious Ritual and Thought

The late first century AD Roman orator Dio Chrysostom in *Discourse 8.9* described the atmosphere surrounding a religious festival in and around a temple during the celebration of the famous Isthmian Athletic Games –

That was the time, too, when one could hear crowds of wretched sophists around Poseidon's temple, shouting and reviling one another, and their disciples, as they were called, fighting with one another, many writers reading aloud their stupid works, many poets reciting their poems, while others applauded them, many jugglers showing their tricks, many fortune-tellers interpreting fortunes, lawyers innumerable perverting judgment and peddlers not a few, peddling whatever they happened to have.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, religious ritual was carried out in the midst of the hurly-burly of everyday life in temples, in fields, at crossroads, around market squares and in open spaces. In the highly pluralistic context of Corinth, it carried not only religious significance but also had social, economic and political importance. Religion was 24/7 in its presence and practical outworking.

Images were variously perceived – some divine images were not actually worshipped while some images of human beings were in fact venerated in cult. The ‘boundary lines’ between divine and human were fluid rather than clear and fixed. Opinion varied as to whether sacrificial festivals involved worship of a divinity OR mere honouring of a human Emperor OR a display of respect to a dead, and now departed, hero. Some dead heroes were counted as gods; others as men. Asclepius was originally a hero with links to the underworld of the dead but later became recognized as a god. Emperor Gaius insisted that sacrifices were made to him as to a god, but Tiberius insisted that his statues were merely ornamental, representing humanity rather than divinity. The ambiguity was increased by a religious system that had no official creed or overseeing authority!

Sacrifices or *thusia* could consist of the small portions of meat actually sacrificed to the gods but the term could equally be used to describe the far larger meal eaten afterwards by the assembled guests, thus raising ambiguity as to whether the meal itself was actually and strictly ‘sacrificial’ in nature!

Many justified involvement in Imperial sacrificial cult on the grounds that it offered honour, respect, gratitude or commemoration, but not actual worship. Sacrifices were often made to try to gain favourable omens for war, for success, for fruitful harvests, for health, for material blessing ie ritual was carried out in order to get something in return, by manipulation of the gods for personal/corporate gain!

Communal meals were often opportunities to gain social/political advancement but they would always include a chant, speech, toast dedicated to the presiding god. Aristotle called religious guilds and dining clubs ‘unions for sacrifice *and* social intercourse’. (*The Nichomachean Ethics* 8.9.5-6) One would be obliged to attend, especially if invited by a rich benefactor or landowner.

The heart of the problem in Corinth

Given that the Corinthians had been under the influence of ritualistic religions in a polytheistic and pluralistic society, they knew only how to try to influence different gods to obtain their various desires for blessing, healing, welfare, fulfillment, success or material benefit. You only *gave* anything to the gods – like the worst parts of the sacrificial meat regularly dedicated to a god – in order to extract *gain, benefit or advantage of some sort* from that particular god. Under the uncertainties, vicissitudes and often cruelties of life under the domination of Roman rulers, conformity to religious practice was required. Custom, culture and tradition reinforced the status quo and most would have simply copied the set rituals blindly and unthinkingly. The Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman, living in the same period of Jesus and Paul, was very aware of this pattern in religious practice – “The greater part of the people go through a ritual not knowing why they do so”. (in Augustine *City of God* Bk 6.11) Such a religious mindset was on a ‘collision course’ with the gospel of Christ. The *religious claims of the Roman Empire ran counter to Paul’s own Jewish monotheism. This meant that the message of salvation in and through a Galilean Jew, crucified by the Roman authorities, was bound to be highly counter-cultural and hugely subversive!*

The Apostle Paul’s *main challenge*, revealed in both 1 and 2 Corinthians, was that there were many in the Corinthian Church, and particularly the new, intruding false apostles, *who had failed to understand the nature, and implications for living, of the gospel of Christ. Ignorance of the true gospel*

was endemic in this young Corinthian church. Paul's goal was to glorify God by encouraging, teaching, training and pleading with this church, and indeed all his churches, **to think theologically and live theologically** in the midst of a demanding and often hostile world.

Ignorance of the gospel of Christ and of the Word of God is a 21st, as well as a 1st, Century problem, both *Inside and outwith* the Church. Paul's goal overall is carefully to correct the faulty thinking of the Corinthians, to challenge the false thinking of the intruding false teachers/apostles and to achieve this by reaffirming the central truths of the gospel of Christ. The apostle's motive was to gain the complete confidence of the Corinthian believers, thereby driving a wedge between those believers and the false apostles who were infiltrating and infecting the church with a dangerous and damaging 'other gospel'. Such ignorance of the true gospel manifested itself in a number of different ways in Paul's reasoning with the Corinthian Church. These areas of *weakness in Corinthian Christian thought and practice will now be traced and tracked in 2 Corinthians. They will form a framework to understand what drove Paul in his purpose and flow of argumentation in this letter to corinth.*

This will then help us to get a handle on the letter as we seek to understand, interpret and expound the truth of this first century letter and to discern how the letter still speaks, indeed shouts, into our current 21st century contexts of living.

The Corinthian Problem and Paul's Purposes in 2 Corinthians

The Features of the Problem of 'Gospel Ignorance' in Corinth

1) The Gospel and Grace

The Apostle Paul was preaching the gospel of Christ in Corinth into a highly pluralistic and polytheistic society. No particular god, 'semi-divinity' or spirit would hold any particular priority in the estimation of the people. People went to different gods according to the perceived functions and potential blessings of a particular god that the worshippers felt might satisfy their current needs and desires. People, as they do today, desired health, welfare, success, fulfillment, prosperity and satisfaction, in return for the regular as well as special sacrificial offerings they made to a whole range of divine/semi-divine and human beings. Paul had already expressed, as early as his writings in 1 Cor 1:18 – 2:5, that '...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God'. To the Jews who demanded miraculous signs, the gospel of a crucified Messiah, the Christ, was a stumbling block, whilst to the Greeks who sought wisdom that same message was indeed sheer foolishness! The whole idea of undeserved grace provided by a crucified carpenter was nonsense. Likewise any concept of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the exclusive, divine Sonship of Christ would have been a non-starter – see 1 Cor 8:4-6. The concept of grace is both bizarre and illogical in every generation, not least in the contemporary postmodern context of the UK.

2) The Gospel and Suffering

The gospel of Christ will always have painful consequences in the lives of Christian believers who seriously follow their Lord and Saviour.

In John 15:18-16:4, Jesus warned His disciples that just as the world hated Him, so also will the world persecute His disciples because the world does not understand or know the Father.

In Acts 9:10-19, right at the outset of Paul's commission to preach to the Gentiles, God warned Paul specifically through the ministry of Ananias about the suffering he would face in his ministry of the Christ to the Gentile world. Luke in his Acts of the Apostles records many examples of Paul's suffering, including the fierce opposition he met in Philippi and Berea (Acts 16; 17:13-15) where he experienced fear and downheartedness. However, Christ

appeared to the apostle in a vision (Acts 18:9-10) that brought Paul comfort because Christ affirmed that He had many people in Corinth, though as yet unconverted. Paul therefore stayed on in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching God's Word (18:11).

Paul knew that the death and resurrection of Jesus would need to be played out in our lives and ministries with much pain and suffering - see 2 Cor 5:14-15 as a clue to such consequences of gospel obedience. The apostle indeed devotes swathes of evidence in 2 Cor to his own struggles in life and ministry – see for example his experiences as he records them in such passages as 1:3-11; 2:14-17; 4:7-18; 6:3-10; 7:5-7; 11:23-33; 12:1-10; 13:3b-10. The Corinthians could not see the point of Paul's pain. After all, religion in their mindset functioned to bring greater prosperity, general welfare and spiritual uplift, *not* greater suffering, weakness and dependence! A church that failed to take on board the very idea of a crucified Messiah would very likely fail to grasp the concept, let alone the validity, of apostolic suffering and weakness as displayed by Paul himself. Nor did that church realize that God brings glory, power, salvation and new life *through* the suffering and struggle *that will be their own destiny as active believers in christ.*

What troubled Paul was not primarily his suffering per se but the fact that there were many who simply failed to understand the value and significance of his weakness and suffering! That's because they also failed to understand the nature of Biblical eschatology and true apostleship.

3) The Gospel and Eschatology

In its encounter with the gospel of Christ, this young church, steeped and raised as it was in an ocean of Greco-Roman religions, was meeting a new religion of great power and glory. The Greco-Roman world placed high value on power and glory. Not surprising therefore that the Corinthian Church simply assumed that they could now share in and experience that power and glory! Their entire social structures and upbringing would have led them to believe that Christ would distribute honour, wealth and esteem to all who had put their trust in Him! To counter these false assumptions, Paul had already explained to the Corinthians in his first letter that they were now called by God to live under the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. That unique death and rising of the Christ had turned this world's values and ways upside down and inside out! That radical change included eschatology!

It is clear from Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor 4:13-5:10 that many Corinthian Christians were struggling to take on board the whole idea of a

future and physical resurrection body for believers. This would have been very much linked to their Hellenistic background in which Platonic ideas of the supremacy of the soul and the far lesser significance of the material body and world would have produced serious ethical consequences that constantly worried Paul. There were Corinthians who were convinced that they had ‘spiritually arrived’ and were ‘rich’ and ‘full’ (1 Cor 4:8) because in some way they had *already* been resurrected. This is the tendency towards so-called ‘*over-realized eschatology*’. If the material was none, or less, significant than the ‘spiritual’, then they felt they could freely eat sacrificial food, indulge themselves in idolatry and engage in sexual immorality with their own, and others’, non-significant bodies. This was the so-called libertine movement of attitude and behavior. At the opposite end of the spectrum, others took an ascetic line through total avoidance of their perceived non-significant physical level of life by ruling out marriage and sex completely!

Many Corinthians had failed to take on board that believers and the church were living in the tension between the *already* and the *not yet*. In terms of the *already*, they were experiencing acceptance before God; the gift of eternal life; the presence of the Holy Spirit as a first fruits/down payment of the final but future inheritance; forgiveness of sins; fellowship with the people of God; conviction that Christ is already ruling with the authority of the Godhead. As far as the *not yet* is concerned, we do not yet achieve the end of death; we do not yet experience the total destruction of the power of sin; we do not yet possess resurrection bodies; we do not yet dwell in a new heaven and new earth; we have not yet achieved perfect love, holiness, fellowship or worship.

NT eschatology is thus simultaneously realized *and* futuristic. Veer too far into the future and the church would be tied up with unhealthy and unhelpful speculation about the Second Coming, a playing down of the benefits, gifts and graces we have already received, and a lack of understanding of the church as a redeemed community seeking present community life and transformation, as a prelude and preparation for the new heaven and the new earth. However, veer too far into present realized eschatology and the church will neglect the future promises of the Lord, will fail to live lives that yearn for the future coming of Christ and will act as if the fullness of all that Christ provided by his death is already here.

The result of unbalanced and ‘over realized’ eschatology in this Corinthian context was that the Corinthians tended to be the lookout for expressions of exaltation with Christ, spiritual power, leadership, religious success, freedom, victorious Christian living and a continually triumphalistic spirit. They were less willing to realize that in the tension between the *already* and the *not yet*,

attitudes like humility, obedience, servanthood and suffering discipleship were essential and profound traits of Christian faith. Tragically and sadly, the Corinthians were employing the former triumphalist expressions, rather than the latter truly Christian traits, to evaluate Paul's spirituality and apostleship – no wonder they found him lacking and inferior, according to their false and deviant measuring rods!

An unbalanced understanding of eschatology in Corinth led to a faulty view of the gospel and that led to major errors of Christian belief and action in life and practice for individuals and for the church as a whole.

4) The Gospel and Christ

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul had sought to show the Christians that they now had to live their lives under the Cross of Christ. This would be highly counter-cultural in an honour/shame culture that elevated power and pride and that would have been ignorant of the actual nature of Christ's Cross and of our new life lived under that Cross. Christ had lived out his life and ministry in weakness and suffering, culminating in the Cross and its glory! If the Corinthians could not see glory in the Cross of Christ, then they would never recognize glory in the sufferings of Christ's Apostle Paul. Thus, the Cross really does defy all worldly wisdom and logic and it was the ignorance of the false apostles and of many Corinthian Christians regarding the true meaning of the Cross of Christ that was leading them into a *different jesus, different spirit and indeed different gospel*.

Paul thus makes frequent reference in 2 Cor to the *Person and Work of Christ*. Strong focus on 'in' and 'through' Christ – 1:19-20. In Christ, God fulfils the Old Covenant (1:18-20), bringing it to an end – 3:7-11. Through Christ, the church comes to God in prayer and thanksgiving – 1:20. By His death and rising, God has ended the old order – 4:16-18; 5:17 – and brought in the new – 5:15-16. End time blessings – God's righteousness, reconciliation and the Spirit – have entered the present – 1:20-22; 5:18-6:2. Jesus Christ is Lord (4:5) – before this man, all will be raised and judged (1:14; 4:14; 5:10). The church will be consummated on that day – 11:2-3. Christ achieved this by setting aside his wealth and taking poverty (8:9). He became sin by his death to give us righteousness – 4:5,11; 10:1. All past promises and future blessings are focussed in Christ. Paul therefore calls the Corinthians to be reconciled to God now, for *this* is the day of salvation – 5:20; 6:2. Salvation by the righteousness of Christ is a major doctrine in both Corinthian letters – 1 Cor 1:2; 23f; 12:3,13,27; 15:25f; 2 Cor 5:21; 8:9.

Of special significance in all this is Paul's triple focus on the theological and practical relationship between *Christology, eschatology and ethics*. The three are indeed inseparable. Thus, Christ has been raised but as first fruits; the final consummation is yet to be when death itself, as well as Christ's enemies, will be overthrown – 1 Cor 15:25f. Christ is the Lord who was sacrificially obedient to His Father and it is *Christology that binds together the two Corinthian letters* – see 1 Cor 2:2,8; 3:11; 8:5f; 12:3; 15:28. *Christ has fulfilled the OT in establishing the new covenant by his life, death and resurrection* – see 1:20; 2:14; 3:17; 4:3-4,6; 6:2; 8:9; 11:4; 13:4. Yet it was in *huge weakness* that Christ died and in which Paul now lives and ministers, YET it is the power of God that is manifested in this very weakness. Central to Paul's thought and practice, life and ministry, is the crucified and risen Christ who is now Paul's *Lord*. Paul's *behaviour* as an apostle simply reflects his Christology, whereas the false apostles' pride, boasting and arrogance reflected their own diluted and muddled Christology!

The Church proclaims Christ as Lord, and that Lord, once crucified at the hands of sinful men and now raised by the power of God, continues to suffer in His Body, the Church. The Church is called to share in Christ's suffering and to live by faith, not by sight. (2 Cor 5:7) Thus the Church carries in and with itself the death of Jesus *and* the promise of a new resurrection life, starting now, but fully and finally to be revealed at the consummation of his eternal reign in the new heaven and the new earth.

5) The Gospel and The Holy Spirit

In a Greco-Roman world inhabited by multitudes of gods, demi-gods, heroes, dead ancestors and spirits, Paul knew that Christians were highly likely to be utterly confused by the plethora of spiritual beings, all now superseded by The Holy Spirit. Not only that, but in such a religious world, there was no necessary connection between spirits and a life of holiness. Priests in religious cults sought the help of 'spirits' but without any awareness at all that holiness was expected of them!

The Spirit is key in 2 Cor and is responsible for the birth, unity and ongoing existence of the church. He is God's 'deposit' (1:22) as a guarantee of what is to come. He gives assurance of our belonging to Christ, equips us for service and maintains our relationship with God. He brings unity (13:14), enlightenment (3:16-17), regeneration (3:6), transformation (4:12,16; 5:1-5). It is Christ, *not paul*, who commends his ministry (3:3; 10:18). Paul reminds the Corinthians of the impact of the Spirit in their lives – 3:3,18; 5:5; 13:14 –

which came by his preaching. They have now come into the era of the Spirit in the new covenant. Their own possession of the Spirit shows the authenticity of Paul's gospel preaching. This proves that Paul's competence comes from God – 3:5-6;10:18;13:5-6.

False apostles, by contrast, pointed to their own credentials – letters of recommendation (3:1-3), church support (2:17), superior heritage (11:21-22), speaking ability (10:10-12), knowledge (11:6) and the working of miracles (12:12). *paul by contrast* points to credentials that are rooted in THE *holy spirit* – the sheer existence of the church (1:21-22; 3:1-3), his faithful witness to the gospel (11:4) and his own sufferings, ethical/moral qualities and divine weaponry (6:4-7). The Spirit confirms the gospel message and convicts people (6:6-7), giving understanding of the new covenant that gives life (3:6-11). The Spirit binds the people of God together (1:21-22; 6:11-13). Paul's focus was very much on the inner change the Spirit brings in lives rather than on spectacular outward signs, even though Paul does accept a place for signs and healings.

Thus, Christology, Cross, Eschatology, New Creation/Life are all inseparable from the *Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*. The apostle explains the dynamic of this working relationship - In the gospel God shines his light into the darkness in the face of Christ (4:6). Believers who turn to Christ receive the inner light of understanding and are moulded into Christ's image (3:16,18). Present glory and present 'deposit' of the Spirit foreshadow fullness in the end time (1:22; 5:5). It is by the Spirit that believers are baptized into the Body (1 Cor 12:13) and both baptism and the Lord's Supper are tied to the Body concept (1 Cor 10:16f), both of them connected intimately to the death of Jesus. Believers are incorporated into the Body of Christ and bear fruit by the indwelling Spirit – Gal 5:22f. The Spirit also gives gifts to the Church for its growth, upbuilding and encouragement – 1 Cor 12.

6. The Gospel And Apostleship: Paul And The False Apostles Compared And Contrasted

Who were the false apostles?

They were a group – 'many' in 2:17; 11:18; cf 10:12. They had 'come' to Corinth (11:4-5) from the outside (10:13-15; 11:4; 12:11) with 'letters of commendation' (3:1). They had encroached on Paul's ministry (10:15-16) and their message had been received (11:4,20). According to Paul's questions in 11:22-23a, they were, like Paul, Hebrews, Israelites, seed of Abraham (ie. Jews) and ministers of Christ. In the view of Paul Barnett, they were probably,

like Paul, Greek-speaking Jews and are likely to have had their origin in the Jerusalem Concordat (2 Cor 10:12-16) which had agreed that the Antioch delegates Saul and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles, whilst the ‘pillar’ apostles of Jerusalem, James, Cephas and John, should go to the circumcised (Gal 2:7-9).

What were they claiming?

These apostles claimed ecstasy, visions, and revelations (12:1); they did miracles (12:11f); they behaved in an authoritative manner; they had oratory ability greater than Paul himself (10:10; 11:6). These were the basis for their claimed credibility in Corinth (5:11-13; 12:1-6) and at a superficial level, they had managed to impress many Corinthians. These people were Greek-speaking Jews from Judaea who acknowledged Jesus as the Christ. It is true though that many Jews in the first century AD were strongly influenced by Hellenistic thought and practice. Paul was thus afraid that such intruders might impose a new and defective gospel, not only on the Corinthian, but also on other early, churches. The situation of course was further complicated by the fact that in the mid-first century AD, doctrinal thinking, eg in Christology, was in its infancy, with no clear-cut boundary lines between orthodoxy and heresy. Indeed, Corinth was a mix of Roman colony, Hellenistic context, popular philosophy, Sophists, synagogue of Hellenistic Jews and various visitors naming and claiming the name of Christ. A veritable guarantee of theological confusion, rather than any hope of a single coherent conviction of truth!

These ‘ministers’ were probably offering the righteousness associated with Moses and the law – 3:3,6 – rather than that of righteousness rooted in Christ’s death – 3:6,9; 5:21 cf 2:17-3:4; 5:18,19,20 ie. they were ‘Judaizers’ – supposed Jewish Christians - who tried to persuade Gentile Christians to live like Jews, obeying the whole or part of the Mosaic Law as a necessary condition for salvation or Christian maturity. Paul called these apostles ‘false’, ‘deceitful workmen’ and ministers of Satan in disguise (11:13-15).

Reason: It might well be their false view of ceremonial/law-based ‘righteousness’ that infuriated Paul and was so opposed to faith in Christ as sin-bearer (1 Cor 1:23). These people claimed the same, indeed ‘superior’, status as apostles, compared with Paul himself! Don Carson believes that Paul’s term ‘super- apostles’ was an ironic reference to the ‘false apostles’ ie the latter constituted one group, not two, and that these Judaizers may have been using the big names of the Jerusalem apostles to add weight to their arguments and falsely claiming that they had actually been sent by the authority of Jerusalem.

How did they attack Paul?

The false apostles systematically criticized Paul and at the same time sowed doubt in the minds of the Corinthians re Paul's competency as an apostle. Their arsenal contained a range of accusations:

- a) He lacks resolve and integrity (1:17-22).
- b) He is accused by his opponents of writing weighty letters, but of having a weak presence (10:1-2,9-11; 11:6; 13:3-4,9).
- c) He was attacked on the grounds of having no authority (10:7-18), so that the false apostles could elevate their own authority and thereby attract the loyalty of the Corinthians.
- d) He is weak in ministry (2:16; 3:5-6) especially in his failure to discipline moral offenders on his second, painful visit (10:1-11; 13:1-3) and how can Paul's gospel be superior to Moses' law when the suffering Paul seems so inferior to the glorious Moses? Indeed, his critics were convinced that Moses' ongoing glory proved the continuing validity of the Mosaic Covenant.
- e) He lacked letters of introduction (10:13-14; cf. 3:1) and therefore, claimed his critics, he needed to depend on self-commendation (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12; 12:11).
- f) He is considered inferior to the Jewish apostles (10:12-12:13, especially 11:5; 12:11-13), and the sheer irony of such an accusation is dealt with by Paul particularly in 11:21a-33.
- g) He turned down financial help from the Corinthian Church or got it deviously via his co-workers (4:2; 7:2; 11:7-12; 12:13-18) or by secretly drawing on funds from the Jerusalem Collection.
- h) He was chided that his own sufferings were a sign that his theology of 'fulfillment' must in fact be false.
- i) He stimulated the anger and resentment of Jews by asserting that the gospel of a crucified Messiah was veiled from his Jewish listeners and readers (1 Cor 1:23).
- j) He was poor as a public speaker compared with the eloquent intruders (10:10; 11:5 cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5).
- k) He lacked the credentials of ecstatic visions and revelations claimed by the newcomers (5:11-13; 12:1-4). This would have appealed to the 'spiritual' in Corinth (1 Cor 4:8,10; 14:12,36).
- l) He was weak, ordinary and worldly (10:3-6; cf. 1:12,17; 5:12-13), unable even to heal himself (12:7-9), cf their power (5:13; 12:1-5).

How did Paul respond to such criticism?

The Apostle Paul warns in 2 Cor about the *dangers of false leadership* since many have been deceived. More than that, he urges the Church to *imitate him as he himself imitates Christ* (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). He offers himself as a *model of discipleship and leadership*. Notice the *variety and mix of his methods* – *threat* (2 Cor 13:2); *explanation* (12:10); *love* (11:11); *rebuke* (12:11); *sarcasm* (12:16); *boasting* (11:16-18); *warning* (11:4,13). Paul is ready to employ *praise, encouragement, wisdom, wit, humour, irony, winsomeness, anguish, hurt and strong emotional intensity*.

Paul's *primary response* is to present *theological argument* to mould the minds of the believers, to move their emotions, to make their wills conform to the Word and Will of God and to manifest change in the actual daily life of individuals and church in Corinth. In particular, Paul responded to the criticisms of his opponents by reasoned argument rooted in revealed divine truth:-

- a) Paul responds to all the criticisms and false boasts of the intruders by making his own '*fool's speech*' in 2 Cor 11:1-12:13. Loaded with irony and a critique of their pride, Paul puts the spotlight on his own weakness, rooted and founded in the *weak and crucified Christ*. 'Ironically' Paul testifies to his experience of God's power and grace in the midst of his own pain (12:7-9). Indeed, he accepts this weakness 'on behalf of Christ' (12:10) and 'for your sakes' (12:15). Paul's pain thus patterns, and in a sense parallels, the agony of Christ in His Death. Only thus can the example of Paul and all believers be said to be 'the aroma of Christ to God' (2:15). God accepts our pain and uses it to spread knowledge of God (2:14).
- b) Paul underlines to his opponents and to errant Corinthians that the old covenant brought death and condemnation but the new covenant grants righteousness and Spirit (3:7-11). The glory of God in Christ is now revealed in the gospel that Paul proclaims (4:4-6), though Paul is merely a '*jar of clay*' (4:7). As Christ died and rose, so Paul suffers but experiences suffering yet freedom/deliverance (4:8-12) and this is now the pattern for all believers in this present age (4:16-5:10 cf 12:19).
- c) Through the death and resurrection of Christ, righteousness has been made available to those who will receive that gift. Through Christ, the

Spirit of God forms a transformed life to those who are in Christ (3:3-18 cf 5:18-21). That new life *will* continue to be shaped by suffering and service for the sake of others that they too might share in the riches and glory of Christ. (4:5,11-12; 6:10b; 11:7; 12:10,15). The *patronage system* in Corinth honoured or shamed values that were built on discrimination, and status that promoted pride and power. Paul's gospel broke down barriers and called for submission to one another and to Christ as Lord. Many in Corinth would have found this a bitter, if not impossible, pill to swallow. Life change is *very* costly.

7) The Gospel and the Issue of Triumphalism: Paul's Dilemmas

On a whole range of fronts, Paul's life and ministry was beset with problems. The false apostles, together with many Corinthians under their sway, had trapped the apostle in a corner and held him on the ropes. Just three examples are enough to illustrate the extent of Paul's dilemmas:

- a) '*Paul lacked apostolic qualifications*' - but if Paul spells out his qualifications, then he will appear to be comparing himself with others and could be charged with what Paul himself dislikes, namely boasting (10:12) and a display of arrogant authority! On the other hand, if he comes across as self-effacing, he will be told he lacks real leadership capacity and will thus lose the respect of those he claims to lead!
- b) '*Weighty in letters but weak in presence*' – but if he writes short letters, there will be too much to deal with and he risks missing something out or being misunderstood, whilst if he writes at length, he will be accused of being negative/strong/overbearing. If, on the other hand, Paul comes to them in person, then the 'weakness' of his rhetoric will be exposed publicly (10:10; 11:6). If, of course, he decides that it's best to do nothing, then he risks losing this church to others.
- c) '*He refuses financial support from the Corinthians (11:5,7-11; 12:11-15; 13:3a,6) which casts doubt on his credentials and his teaching authority/ability/validity. Maybe he's getting money from the Jerusalem Collection on the sly (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; 2 Cor 12:16-18)*' – but if he carries on preaching for free and refusing support, then this confirms his fake/inferior teaching ministry, whilst if he does accept gifts, he could be accused of greed and materialism!

The false apostles operated along the lines of the Sophists who majored in self-commendation and high fees. They adopted the Sophists' love of *boasting and self-elevation*. The fatal combination of *an over-realized eschatology + an interest in visions and revelations + human sin + a strong cultural orientation towards power, pride, and success* all made the Corinthian Church *more ready to listen to the false apostles than to Paul's message of the cross! They thus readily adopted the mind-set of triumphalism*.

Paul's own life and ministry *parallel* and *replicate* the life, death and resurrection of Christ (1:5; 2:15; 4:10-12; 12:10). This is what validates his claim to genuine, authentic apostleship. False apostles claim visions but those led to pride and boasting. Paul's experience of visions and revelations led to the *thorn in the flesh* so that Paul experienced *dependence, humility, patience* and the need for *prayer*. God's power is seen in Paul's – and our – weakness (4:5; 5:20; 10:1,10; 12:10).

The intruders disguised their teaching as 'Christian' and this made it harder to spot! Many were easily deceived, embracing the error of *triumphalism* rooted in another Jesus, Spirit and gospel!! (11:4)

8) The Gospel and good works / Transformed Living

Much of Paul's focus in life and ministry was on his role as Apostle to the Gentiles, rooted in his absolute conviction of the revealed truth of justification by grace through faith. Yet we do well never to forget that he was also committed to *active works* as our response to divine grace:-

- a) *The need to perform good works* – Paul pleaded with the church to show love, forgiveness and support to the person being disciplined (2:1-11); the climax of 5:1-10 on resurrection life is that we are to please the Lord for we will be judged according to 'the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (5:9-10); we are a new creation and should no longer live for ourselves (5:15,17); Paul and other servants of God commended themselves in every way (6:1-13) and they had damaged no one by their lives and ministries, seeking only to love and encourage (7:2-16); the apostle issues warnings about negative Corinthian behavior, promises punishment for acts of disobedience and affirms consistency in positive actions (10:1-11; 12:11-21; 13:1-4); finally he challenges the church to examine whether it is 'in the faith', the test including their deeds (13:7a,7c,8,9).

b) ***The need to show new life in actions and attitudes*** – In a very real sense, of course, actions, attitudes and new life overlap within a person and a church, but there are texts in 2 Cor where Paul puts a focus on the transformation of life by the Spirit’s work. In 2 Cor 1:1-12, Paul examines the links between pain, comfort, endurance, patience, dependence, prayer and thanksgiving, showing their ultimate source to lie in the Godhead. Even their relationships are conducted ‘in the holiness and sincerity that are from God (1:12). God’s power is seen in OUR weakness (2:12-17; 4:1-18) and new life comes by the Spirit of God (3:1-18). We are to live new and holy lives, separated from pagan sinfulness (6:14-7:1). The apostle’s love, knowledge of God and his suffering ministry are all indicative of his constant dependence on the power supplied by the Spirit of God (Ch 11). New life is urged – ‘aim for perfection’ (13:11); ‘live in peace’ (13:11) and ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all’ (13:14).

c) ***The need to demonstrate generous giving to the poor*** – In the midst of the records we have of the glorious buildings and institutions of ancient Rome, it is vital not to forget that just as Corinth’s population in Paul’s era consisted of about 30% slaves, so also Rome’s population consisted of about 1 million inhabitants. Aside from a very small elite of the rich and famous, the vast majority eked out a precarious existence in almost indescribable squalor! The population density of this capital of the Roman Empire was way above that of any modern city in Europe or North America and its density of 300 people per acre was more than twice that of modern Kolkata. The massive contrasts between the extremely rich and the desperately poor within the Empire of Paul’s lifetime is starkly reflected by Horsley and Silberman (*The Message and the Kingdom* p.86) in their stunning description of the difference between the cross outside the Jerusalem walls and the counter-image of the glorious splendour of internal architecture within the walls – “The cross and the Corinthian column were two sides of the Roman experience. One offered shade and shelter to all those who would accept the Roman world’s logic and structures of power; the other systematically transformed anyone branded as an enemy of the Roman order from a living, breathing person, into a bruised, bloated, almost unrecognizable corpse”.

The Apostle Paul worked very largely with the small urban churches scattered across the Empire and became very familiar with the deprivation and desperation of the poor. He himself worked with his hands night and day, toiling in demeaning and exhausting labour which fitted him to understand and identify with the vast numbers of the poor in these towns and cities – see 1 Cor 4:10-12, 9:18-19; 2 Cor 11:7, 27. Thus Paul writes to the Corinthian Church out of personal experience and a deep burden of heart and mind, rooted in God's transformative power, concerning the 'giving generosity' of the poor Macedonian Christians in the midst of their own poverty, trials and joy! Giving oneself *first* to the Lord produces action in generous giving that proves a practical understanding and experience of grace in a church's communal life (8:1-7). Such action is based on Christ's own grace and generosity and it proves genuine love for the poor and needy (8:24). Paul wants the Corinthians to be generous in their giving to the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem as a testimony to the gospel that knows no boundaries. Such abounding 'in every good work' (9:8) and such obedience that accompanies their 'confession of the gospel of Christ' (9:13) yields thanksgiving and glory to God (9:11,13,15). Generosity – the acid test of grace and spirituality.

The astonishing reality in all of this profound connection between our own good works and our own transformation in Christ is the fact that they are patterned after the weakness and suffering of Christ and of Paul and of ourselves. Marva Dawn has it in a nutshell in *Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God* p.47 – "Even as Christ accomplished atonement for us by suffering and death, so the Lord accomplishes witness to the world through our weakness. In fact, God has more need of our weakness than of our strength.....By our union with Christ in the power of the Spirit in our weaknesses, we display God's glory".

Paul's language does not refer merely to the reconciliation and transformation of individual believers or churches or even groups of churches. He records Christ's death and resurrection as cosmic in their results and consequences. Supernatural, evil, demonic principalities and powers have been disarmed in God's work of New Creation. The Spirit of God is at work on a cosmic scale, working to demolish corrupted social, political and religious structures. How many contemporary churches now understand and teach such truth?

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

11.

Paul's stress and anxiety over the Corinthian Church were not the failures his critics would label them; 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

12.

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. The united answer of the whole group was ‘*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 'triumphalist' 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. 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 (Rom 1:28-32) – 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’

13. The fulfillment of the prophetic promise that Yahweh would usher in hope and *shalom* to the entire world.
14. The Roman setting of ‘gospel’ would mean the celebration of the birth or new reign of an emperor or king or Caesar.
15. 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 them. 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)

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 Iis 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-aggrandisement 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 in-valid 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.

| | | |
|-----|----------|---|
| 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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