

Text: 2 Cor 4.1-18

1 Corinthians: *“the epistle of the cross in its social application.”*¹

2 Corinthians: *the epistle revealing the heart of pastoral application.*

In both epistles, Paul addresses the bad attitudes and actions of an immature church, still much affected by the world from which it is drawn.

A Preliminary Outline of 2 Corinthians:

Opening (1.1-11)

Addressing Corinthian Perceptions and Paul’s Ministry Philosophy (1.12-7.16)

Defending Paul’s Conduct (1.12-2.17)

Exposition of Paul’s Philosophy (3.1-6.10)

Appeal for Corinthian confidence (6.11-7.16)

Instructions concerning the offering (8.1-9.15)

Assertion of apostolic authority (10.1-13.10)

Conclusion (13.11-14)²

I. The sincere gospel ministry (1-6)

Look back to 2.6, what is “this ministry” that Paul describes? (1)

The New Covenant ministry of the gospel

What methods does Paul reject in v. 2a? How would this be “losing heart” as mentioned in v. 1b?

Paul renounces subtle words and crafty speech; he is not ashamed of the gospel

What is the character of Paul’s preaching? (2b)

Clear manifestation of the truth

Who is to blame when some don’t get the gospel message? (3-4)

The veiled minds and blinded eyes (caused by Satan)

¹ G. G. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. William Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, n.d.), 739.

² Adapted from Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003).

What are blind minds blind to? (4b)

The image of God in Jesus Christ

Paul was commending himself in this book (see v. 2), but in what way did he commend himself? (5)

Preaching Christ Jesus as Lord and himself as Christ's bondservant (slave)

What was Paul's motivation for his preaching philosophy? (6)

The saving faith he experienced in Christ, who enlightened his heart

II. The mortal gospel ministers (7-15)

What does Paul mean when he says he has this treasure in earthen vessels? (7a)

God gave the ministry to mere mortal men

What is the reason for this paradox? (7b)

So that the greatness of God could be shown, not the greatness of the preacher

Note: Constable uses the label 'monism' to describe man's nature as "a unity of material and immaterial parts" as opposed to 'dualism' where man is made up of "higher and lower elements"³ This is not quite right: man is body and spirit, a duality — not monism, not dualism

Paul contrasts the weakness of the earthen vessel with the power of God to show how God enables a believer to carry on. What are the contrasts? (8-9)

1. **afflicted** but not **crushed**
2. **perplexed** but not **despairing**
3. **persecuted** but not **forsaken**
4. **struck down** but not **destroyed**

What does Paul mean by all this?

He is confident in God who is always with him

³ Constable, 2 Cor 4.7.

Paul has one more contrast in v. 10, what is it?

Dying of Jesus and life of Jesus [in our body]

The word Paul uses for “dying” is not “death” but “dying” — what does he mean he is carrying about in his body?

The sufferings of Christ, sharing in his sufferings

What does partaking of Jesus’ sufferings produce in our gospel ministry? (11)

The manifestation of the life of Jesus

When this is displayed to lost people, what happens to them? (12)

They receive life from the message

In v. 13, Paul quotes Ps 116.10. We need to read the whole Psalm to get the context. What is the “same Spirit of faith” that Paul says he has? (13)

The spirit of faith in God despite what men might do to him

What else kept Paul going despite attacks on his ministry, including physical assaults? (14)

Certain hope in the resurrection

Paul’s testimony in v. 15 is remarkable: “all things are for your sakes” — all his sufferings were blessings to the Corinthians themselves. Why is this ironic?

The Corinthians were the cause of some of his suffering

III. The spiritual gospel confidence (16-18)

Paul is conscious that the sufferings are taking a toll, nonetheless. Yet why does he not lose heart? (16)

Because he is growing spiritually as well

What is the contrast in v. 17?

Light affliction now produces an eternal weight of glory

Where did Paul keep his focus? (18)

On eternal things, not temporal things