

Joy in Ministry

Even in the hard times

Introduction to the Epistle

The significance of 2 Corinthians for understanding Paul's relationship with his communities

- 2 Corinthians shows us a length of relationship between Paul and a community and a growing (and vexed) relationship
- But his commitment to them and to the gospel.

Part of the value of the Corinthian epistles is that it gives us a snap shot of Paul's relationship with a community beyond the initial meeting.

Extended connection between Paul and the Corinthians

Paul visits Corinth for the first time, spending about 18 months there (Acts 18:11) during the time of Gallio (52/53). He

- then leaves Corinth and spends about 3 years in *Ephesus* (Acts 19:8, 19:10). (Roughly from AD 53 to 57)
- Paul writes the "warning letter", probably from Ephesus.
- Paul writes *1 Corinthians* from Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8).
- Paul visits the Corinthian church a second time, as he indicated he would in 1 Corinthians 16:6. This is probably still during his 3 years based in Ephesus. 2 Corinthians 2:1 calls this a "painful visit".
- Paul writes the "letter of tears"; at some point he indicates his intention to visit again (but then does not do so) – referred to in 2.4
- Paul writes 2 Corinthians, indicating his desire to visit the Corinthian church a third time (2 Cor 12:14, 2 Cor 13:1).
- Paul presumably made the third visit after writing 2 Corinthians, because Acts 20:2-3 indicates he spent 3 months in Greece. In his letter to Rome, written at this time, he sent salutations from some of the principal members of the church to the Romans.

How many Corinthian epistles?

Probably most elaborate suggestion is Semler

1. The Previous letter (1 Cor 5.9)
2. 1 Corinthians
3. the 'severe letter'
4. 2 Corinthians 1-9
5. 2 Corinthians 10-13

Another option is that 2 Corinthians 10-13 is the severe letter in which he indicated his desire to come again and then doesn't.

The Issue between Paul and the Corinthians

On the surface it appears that the issue is trivial in the extreme – he said he would come and he did not. In reality the issue is far more complex than that

- The tensions already existed between Paul and the Corinthians – the factions that caused him to write 1 Corinthians
- The question of the 'super apostles' and their role in undermining Paul

In reality the letter is a working example of the slow corrosion of a relationship and the issues that arise out that kind of corrosion

- Additional issue of the problem of Paul's authority and the way in which this may have undermined his credibility

The Glory We Reflect

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

v. 7 But if the ministry of death, engraved in writings on stones, was in glory so that the children of Israel were unable to fix their eyes on the face of Moses on account of the glory of his face, a glory which has now been set aside, v. 8 how much more will the ministry of the spirit be in glory?

v. 9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, by much more will the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. v. 10 For the thing that has been glorified has not been glorified in respect of the surpassing glory. v. 11 For if the thing that is being rendered ineffective came through glory, by much more is the thing that remains in glory?

v. 12 Therefore, having such a hope we behave with much confidence v. 13 and not as Moses who put a veil on his face so that the children of Israel could not fix their eyes on the end of what was passing away. v. 14 But their thoughts were hardened for until this very day the same veil remains on the reading out loud of the old covenant not being uncovered because in Christ it is abolished. v. 15 But until today whenever Moses is read a veil lies on their hearts v. 16 but whenever he turns to the Lord, the veil is cast off. v. 17 But the Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. v. 18 And we all with faces that have been unveiled gaze at the glory of the Lord as though in a mirror we are being transfigured into the same image from glory into glory just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Prayer

*Glorious God, may your glory so infect us
that we reflect your glory to the world
transforming,
enlivening
and strengthening
those we meet
through Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen*

The Context

Understanding 2 Corinthians

- The first two chapters largely explore why he hasn't done what he said he would
- Chapter 3 begins with a word association around **letter** (they wanted a reference to prove that they could trust him and his gospel and he won't give it) – reaching climax with letter kills, spirit gives life

Argument surrounds whether Paul needs a letter of recommendation – answer is they should be able to recognize God's glory for themselves without a letter

Out of this grows a fascinating reflection on glory and its impact on Christian life

- It is based on Exodus 34 – and is an extended reflection on that passage (maybe a synagogue sermon?)
- Whole Argument based on Qal vaHomer – if this is the case how much more will that be the case?

Glory

Difficulties of defining glory

Lewis Carroll – Alice through the Looking Glass

'...and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when

you might get un-birthday presents---' 'Certainly,' said Alice. 'And only one for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!' 'I don't know what you mean by "glory",' Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't--till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you"!' 'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument",' Alice objected. 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more or less.'

Glory and the central theme in encounters with God

- heavy – so that which appears to the eye – came to mean the reputation of someone
- seen by important people on tops of mountains

Exodus 34:29-35 ²⁹ Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant¹ in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. ³² Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. ³³ When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; ³⁴ but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Significance of Moses' experience is

- infectiousness of God's glory
- fadingness of God's glory
- purpose of the veil

The possibility that 2 Corinthians 3.7-18 is one of Paul's synagogue sermons – note that Paul interpolates glory into the story.

Setting up his premise

v.7-8

The philosophical basis that lies behind Paul's argument here – Qal vaHomer

- If the old covenant came in glory – how much more will the new covenant come in glory
- Interesting piece of interpretation – Exodus doesn't say that the people can't fix their eyes on Moses – says they run away, Paul attempts to understand this by giving an explanation.
- This seems to follow Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.70 who, says, "their eyes could not endure the dazzling brightness that flashed from him like the rays of the sun."

Expanding on his argument or getting lost in his own logic

Vv9-11

Ministry of condemnation and ministry of justification

- Genitives does this mean that arises out of or that brings?

- Also gives us an insight into Paul's understanding of glory – what had glory was limited in respect of the way in which it was surpassed.

Next step in the Argument

Vv12-15

Triggered by 'the thing that is being rendered ineffective'

- Paul brings in next bit of Moses story – the veil and the reason for the veil: the fading glory.
- Paul and his companions behave with confidence (unlike the Israelites who ran away)
- And they do this because for them the glory never fades

vv. 14-15

Paul begins to pull at the metaphor here – the veil stops referring to Moses' actual veil and instead to the state of being unable to see something

- That which was meant to enable them to encounter God's glory became that which prevented them from seeing him at all.
- The veil now lies over their hearts and not just over Moses' face

Climax of Argument

V 16

When Moses turns to the Lord (i.e. YHWH) he removes the veil

AND

When someone turns to Christ the veil is removed

So this verse acts as a pivot looking back to what happened with Moses and forward to what happens with us

- Fascinating example of how to read the Bible – historically (Moses) and for today (us)

V 17

If interested in Trinity this is a little New Testament conundrum

- Who is the Lord?
- Who is the Spirit?
- Who is the Spirit of the Lord?

Spirit of the Lord is that which brings freedom i.e. it is impossible to be veiled where the spirit is.

v 18

We all

- reminds us that attention is now on us
- now is not restricted to one special person but available for all

With unveiled faces

- Because we are beholding the Lord as Moses did without a veil
- Because we are beholding the Lord direct and not through a mediator
- Because the glory we see is unfading and so doesn't need veiling
- Vulnerability that comes from this

Katoptrizomenoi

- Extensive discussion about its meaning
- Only occurs here in whole of New Testament
- Is in the middle – and outside New Testament means look at oneself in a mirror
- Three options for understanding word
 - To behold as in a mirror (NASB, NRSV)
 - To reflect like a mirror (KJV, RV, NEB, JB, NIV)
 - To gaze (RSV, NAB)
- Importance of this is that
 - We are constantly in the presence of the glory that does not fade
 - We catch this glory as Moses did
 - We reflect that glory
 - We no longer have to behold a special person or be on the top of a mountain it is available when we look in a mirror

As a result we are being transformed – as Moses was in the presence of God

- Only we are in the constant presence of the Lord so the transformation is constant
- And does not fade

Meditation

Glory of Jesus - unfading and eternal

We gaze on you

Unprotected, vulnerable – we behold you

Glory of Jesus – unfading and eternal

We gaze on you

Transformed and transforming – we become like you

Glory of Jesus – unfading and eternal

We gaze on you

In ourselves – we reflect you

Glory of Jesus – unfading and eternal

We gaze on you

In our brothers and sisters – we encounter you

Glory of Jesus – unfading and eternal

We honour you

The Pressures we Face

2 Corinthians 4.1-12

v. 1 For this reason, having this ministry to the degree in which we received mercy, we are not weary v. 2 but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking around in deceit or the distortion of the word of God but in the disclosure of the truth commending ourselves to all human consciousness in the presence of God. v. 3 And even if our good news is veiled, it is veiled in the things that are passing away. v. 4 In them the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers so that the light of the good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine forth. v. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves but Jesus Christ Lord, and ourselves as your slaves on account of Jesus. v. 6 Because God is the one saying 'Light will shine out of darkness' who has shone in our hearts for the enlightenment of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

v. 7 But we have this treasure in containers made of clay so that the surpassingness of the power might be of God and not from us. v. 8 In everything being pressed down but not crushed, disturbed but not despairing, v. 9 driven out but not abandoned, knocked down but not destroyed, v. 10 carrying about always the death of Jesus in the body, so that also the life of Jesus might be revealed in our body.

v. 11 For constantly we, the ones living, are handed over to death through Jesus so that also the life of Jesus might be revealed in our flesh which dies. v. 12 Consequently death is at work in us, but life in you.

God of all love

Give us such perseverance of heart

That we might live in your light

Neither crushed nor despairing

Neither abandoned nor destroyed

But revealing your risen life in our body

Amen

Introduction

One of those passages in which Paul reflects on the disaster of his ministry and the impact of this on the gospel that he proclaims

the complexity of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians and 2 Corinthians as the place where this becomes explored in detail

- significance in this context is the language he uses of carrying death and life in his body

The context of this passage as following 3.18 and forming the backdrop for what Paul talks about here.

v 1-2 Statement that covers most of epistle

Discouragement in ministry

Here Paul reveals why he continues going

- On account of the glory reflected
 - Having a ministry by the mercy of God

He is not....v. 1 egkakew –

- Discouraged
- Get tired (Luther)
- Neglect our tasks (Barrett)
- Despair (Lietzmann)
- Act in cowardly way (Bultmann)
- Distaste or aversion (Baumert)
- cover the sense of being afraid in the face of great difficulty and was used of women looking forward to childbirth

vv 2-6 Secrecy and revelation

But... Paul contrasts hiding with openness (realised apocalyptic)

- he does nothing by cunning and secret but is open about everything that he does
- two judges all human consciousness (not just conscience) and God

The only thing that is hidden/'veiled' is the gospel

- possible translations of 'perishing' those who are or the things that are
 - those picks up 2. 15

2 Corinthians 2:15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;
--

- things might make more sense here (i.e. glory rendered ineffective and this age)
- or maybe both?

The point is that it is not by its nature veiled but only among those people or situations that are passing away

- This age and the world to come

The God of this age

An odd phrase and used only here in New Testament

- much higher view of the Devil than most places in New Testament
- use of theos is hugely problematic (seized on by Marcion as evidence of two Gods)
- one argument 'God has blinded the unbelievers of this age'

Whoever this God is – verse must be understood in terms of chapter 3 and chapter 5 (if not also Colossians 1.15-20)

- light is now illumination and well as glory
- veil is preventing both
- and so inhibiting creation (cf next chapter)

But also gives us the key for understanding Paul's language of flesh, bodies etc...

- it is this age not this body that Paul problems with
- this age veils the revelation of heaven to earth

even when that revelation is of Christ as the eikwn of God

Paul's ministry is about proclaiming this revelation – not himself but Jesus, Christ, Lord.

Preaching

Two things:

- Jesus Christ Lord – fascinating common way of doing this – way of intertwining the three words as full description of Christ.
- Your slaves – only time he does this in his writings...is there a link with slaves of Christ?

Light

Back again to chapter 3 – light is shining in creation, in hearts, and in face of Christ

- Intermingling of light as physical, spiritual and rational
- What is the connection between all of these?

vv. 7-10 Fragility and the Gospel

But the light of Jesus is not attached to Paul – there is a significance for Paul in that his body is particularly fragile...

- The clay jars exacerbate the source of the light – the glory must never be mistaken as coming from apostles
- Earthenware was important in Corinth in this period – not least because they made very poor quality, thin earthenware jars as lamps. Thinness and cracks in the jars allowed the light to shine through
- Ref. to earthenware as being in contrast to value seems common, Epictetus says to someone that his utensils are of gold but his discourse is earthenware

Paul's pairings

1. connected with pressure (under pressure/ restricted)
2. connected compound verbs linked being at a loss (at a loss / entirely at a loss -- so what about 1.8?)
3. pursued/overtaken or driven out/abandoned
4. military metaphor felled to ground but get up again

Carrying death in the Body

Nb the difference between 'the body' and 'our body'

- nevertheless Paul's theology of bearing the death/sufferings of Christ

2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

Colossians 1:24 I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

but crucial element here is is the fragility that reveals rather than hides the light of Christ

- favourite Hymn tis only the splendour of light hideth thee – nice sentiment but not exactly true...

vv 11-12 Ministry as bearing death and bearing life

Paul seems here to get to the heart of ministry; it is about bearing death in own body to foster life in others

The Light of Christ shines

tiny rays of divinity reaching outwards through the cracks in my existence

these cracks are things that shame me,

I paper over them, trying to stick them together again

hoping that no one will notice

but all the while

The Light of Christ shines

tiny rays of divinity through the cracks of my existence

Perhaps one day I will succeed,

pull myself together and present to the world the façade that I would like them to see

the me I'm proud of,

a shiny well crafted existence worthy for the eyes of all whom I meet

but then all they'll see is me

So maybe I should leave the cracks alone, even lever them open a little wider so that

The Light of Christ can shine

great rays of divinity through the cracks in my existence.

The Renewal we Receive

2 Corinthians 5.14-21

Vv 14-15 For the love of Christ holds us prisoner; being convinced that one has died on behalf of all, therefore all have died. And on behalf of all people/things he died, so that those living might no longer live on behalf of themselves but on behalf of the one dying and having been raised on behalf of them.

V 16 Consequently, we, from the present, we understand no-one according to the flesh. Even if we knew Christ according to the flesh, but now we no longer know.

V 17 Consequently if anyone (is) in Christ – new creation, the old things have passed by – behold the new things have happened

V 18 All things (are) from God the one reconciling us to himself through Christ and giving to us the ministry of reconciliation

V 19 that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their wrong doing and placing in us the word of reconciliation'

V 20 On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are representatives, as of God exhorting through us. V21 We beg you, therefore, on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God, he made sin the one not knowing sin on our behalf so that we might become righteousness of God in him.

Jesus, Lord of reconciliation

Render both in us and around us such new creation

That all things brought again to new life

Might be drawn into

the glorious reconciliation of God.

Amen

Introduction

Significance of this passage for understanding Paul's theology

- The way in which this passage concentrates Paul's theology about past, present and future reality in Christ
- Weaving in old and new creation.

Verse 14-15 – on Behalf of....

The Love of Christ holds us prisoner – an important key to understanding Paul and his motivation

The importance - and growing importance in Pauline scholarship (see esp Jimmy Dunn) of representation in understanding Jesus relationship to us.

- clear language not substitutionary here (only switches to that in verse 21) if it were substitutionary language it would say Christ has died therefore we don't have to - instead says Christ has died therefore all have died.
- takes us into the world of corporate personality in which our identities are bound up in the identity of the body of Christ, and Christ's identity is bound up with ours.
- If want to get to heart of re-creation we find it in corporate personality - re-creation occurs to bring about a whole new identity
- hinted at here and later in the passage by the string of use of 'uper' - our very self changes

Verse 16 – Flesh/Spirit

So begin the passage 'proper' with 'Consequently' – i.e. as a result of the representation that has taken part in Christ's death which means that we have joined with him in dying

- From now on - 'from the now' marks the element of re-creation. Things have changed and we react accordingly. New world order - eschatological in import.
- two different ways of knowing οἶδα and γινώσκω – no agreement about whether these do have a different meaning here (if there is then οἶδα is more to do with understanding and

comprehension and γινωσκω has more to do with head knowledge) but the knowing κατά σάρκα indicates a different kind of knowing.

- If there is a difference in knowing, it points to the depth and intimacy of the knowledge of Christ in the recreated world – knowing what he looked like vs a deep loving intimacy which affects identity...
- possibly also a dig at Paul's opponents - they might have met the historical Jesus but that isn't important anymore.

verse 17 – new creation

- If anyone is in Christ - new creation occurs
 - NIV 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
 - NRS 2 Corinthians 5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation
 - ASV 2 Corinthians 5:17 Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature:
 - NLT 2 Corinthians 5:17 What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons

in them

in the world

as opposed to translations which struggle to render this properly

- this is where depth of re-creation is encountered - the new heaven and new earth spill into the present
- the old order has passed away and the new order has arrived – though elsewhere it becomes clear that this is not complete (see Romans 8!)

verse 18 - Reconciliation

For me verse 18 gives us the hallmarks of re-creation

Here Paul moves onto his most important argument of all

- right at the heart of re-creation lies reconciliation - everything within the new creation emanates from the one who not only is working for reconciliation but also giving us the task of reconciliation as well.
- Contrast to creation order where boundaries are put in place (nb the first three acts of creation create space which is held in place by boundaries)– here the boundaries are broken down
- What is reconciliation? Literally the Greek word comes from exchange, as in the money changer's profit but comes to mean a change from enmity to friendship.
- The Corinthian context makes this theology even more poignant given the dire state of relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. If the hallmark of the new creation is reconciliation – what has gone wrong? The same question could be asked of us today.....
- this passage loops back to pick up 2 Cor 3 and Paul's contrast between the diakonia associated with the letter and that associated with the spirit

Verse 19 – the message of reconciliation

Nature of Message

Complexity of the word diakonia - ministry, service

- this in my view is a vital (and often ignored) passage in the attempt to identify it
- different translations struggle to make sense of ὡς ὅτι at beginning of the verse: for me best explanation is that this is simply opening quotation marks - ministry of reconciliation is the proclamation of God's reconciliation of the world. In short the proclamation of new creation: 'In Christ God is reconciling the world to himself...'
- One of knotty problems of verse 19 is whether it means God was reconciling the world in Christ (i.e. reconciliation takes place in Christ) or God was in Christ reconciling the world (i.e. God was in Christ) in my view strange question to ask.... because it is clear that both are true but if Christ is encompasses reconciliation – then we have more interesting answers to the question of atonement...

Impact of Reconciliation

- Two way effect of reconciliation - our estrangement from God but also God's estrangement from us
- hence not counting trespasses against us (note the different words for sin and significance here)
- Quote from James Denney *The Death of Christ* 'It is not the main part of his vocation to tell men (sic) to make their peace with God, but to tell them that God has made peace with the world. At bottom, the gospel is not good advice but good news.'

Cosmic impact of the Reconciliation

- Notice also is cosmic dimension - reconciling individuals with himself but the world is already reconciled - only thing left is to decide if we join in with it or not!
- Goes on to say how cosmic reconciliation has taken place - notice is twofold. Not reckoning trespasses (stepping over the lines) and placing in us logos of reconciliation
- Because of all of this we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ - we beg you join in....

Substitution language

- Ends with what we might recognise as more substitutionary language - straight swap - as a result of reconciliation that has taken place – although notice that we become righteousness of God in him.....

Meditation

Behold new creation

God begins once more the patient task of shaping things into life

Behold new creation

The new creation springs forth, governed
not by barriers but by freedom,
not by separation but by unity,
not in alienation but in relationship

Behold new creation

And we are called to be co-creators,
Carefully crafting
Faithfully proclaiming
Joyfully encouraging
All people into relationship with each other and with God

Behold, all things have become new

On behalf of Christ we beg you – be reconciled