



This week at Magdalen Road Church we reached to 2v12 to 3v6 in 2 Corinthians. Here Paul clarifies more of what real gospel ministry looks like. We began by thinking about being theologians of the cross rather than theologians of glory. This is the article Dan quoted from: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-difference-between-a-theologian-of-the-cross-and-a-theologian-of-glory/>

+ Real ministry brings the smell of life or death (2v14 to 16)

Suddenly we find ourselves in the midst of a glorious military carnival. The returning army is rejoicing in their victory. Paul is imagining that he is either one who is excited by the military conquest as it is victorious, or else as a servant who has been captured and lost everything. The translation in our NIV assumes that we are captives.

What is especially striking though, is that Paul arrives at v14 in the context of v12 and v13. Paul is rejoicing despite things not being right for him in Troas. He is able to remember the victory of Christ even in the midst of inner turmoil and plans not coming to fruition. The victory celebration image develops because at the heart of the celebration they would be priests burning incense bringing the good news of a victory won. To God we are the aroma of Christ - it's always pleasing to him - whereas to others there will be a mixed response. To some we are an aroma of life and to others an aroma of death.

We reminded ourselves that this was the experience of Jesus (the best evangelist ever) and so we should not be tempted to water down l'll message and appear less smelly. We were also reminded of the starkness of the two responses.

+ Real ministry is not about serving self (2v17- 3v6)

Paul then highlights three ways in which the so-called super apostles are inauthentic in their ministry As they are in it for themselves:

1. Peddling for profit (V 17)

The 'peddling' word here is actually the word for corrupt and it comes from the wine trade. It's the language of watering down wine to maximise profit. Perhaps for them it's tweaking the message to maximise popularity, hence positive responses, hence income. Rather than peddling for profit there is to be an accountability to the one who gave them the message and sent them to deliver the message.

2. Commendation from others (3v1-3)

The context here seems to be of self-referential in-crowds whereby someone is only considered legit if they have a 'letter of recommendation' from somebody else with authority or who is considered 'sound'. But Paul had known them for 18 months and ministered among them! They didn't need a letter to check whether he was alright as they themselves were a letter pointing to the faithfulness of his ministry.

3. Claiming self importance (3v4-6)

The repetition of the word competent here makes you think that the super apostles are likely boasting in their own competence. Paul's corrective though is to remind them that God has made them competent and he's the only one who can! It is this internalised new covenant ministry that brings life by the spirit that matters.

Here are a few questions to start off your group...

Taken from Chapter 2 of "Caring for One Another "

(please read the chapter if you have time)

- if our confidence and competence comes not from ourselves, but from Christ, how does that help us move towards others?
- what makes us reluctant to move towards others? Are there particular people we find it hard to move towards?
- what first step could you make this week in moving towards someone?

What do you remember so far from this letter? What's the situation in Corinth? What is Paul's basic argument?

v15 How easy do you find it to give thanks to God even when things haven't gone according to plan? Why?

What kind of an aroma are we, to whom and why? How does it make you feel that we are an aroma?! How can we help each other with this?

Paul's three dead-ends are challenging:

- What does it mean to peddle the word of God for profit? How might that apply to us?
- What were these letters of recommendation? How might that apply to us?
- What does it show that these false apostles were claiming self competence? Where does our competence come from?

What 1 thing can you take away this week to pray and chew over more?