



This week at Magdalen Road Church in chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians Paul 'turns up the dial' on how important it is to challenge the so-called super apostles and their ministry emphases. He brings into clear focus the outworking of their challenge of him in both his message and his ministry.

v1-15: A different Gospel Message

As we have seen a number of times through the letter, Paul focuses on two particular challenges that he is facing from them. The first one is again to do with his words:

-speaking

Paul picks up on the fact that his speaking (at least to their ears) does not sound very impressive or powerful. We looked back in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians to see where Paul deliberately puts aside some of his 'speaking eloquence' so that they will not rely on him, but rather on Christ and the message about him.

Paul seems to have adapted his methods in Corinth because he knew their tendency to be impressed by the wrong things.

-support

The fact that Paul had not asked the Corinthians for their support has also become a bit of a stumbling block to them. In Paul's mind he didn't want to be a burden on them, however in their culture (as in some ways we see in ours) - if something is free perhaps we trust it less!? So in their culture and experience of itinerant ministers who pedal the Gospel for profit, Paul's not asking for financial support from them, has made them ask questions. Did he not seek to raise funds there because he's not actually very good?

The conclusion of the section though is profoundly challenging and eye-opening. Paul describes the super apostles as teaching a different gospel (v4) however there is very little in the letter about the content of that 'different' message, rather it's less about what is being taught but more about how it is being taught and about the expectations of ministry. This is not simply a question of style or emphasis though, but actually gets at the very heart of this gospel is: in v13 onwards Paul describes them as Satanic. This is the world shaping the church. This letter matters profoundly.

v16-33: A different Gospel Minister.

In the second half of the chapter Paul carefully spells out his (deliberately laughable) credentials as a gospel minister. He outlines a catalogue of calamities.

We began with the conclusion at the end v32 to 33 which we thought of as the punchline of the joke as Paul outlines from Acts 9 his experience in Damascus. Paul entered Damascus as Saul, a proud Pharisee with credentials who was hunting Christians, he leaves Damascus as Paul, a nobody: the hunted. This is the beginning of his ministry, things started badly and only got worse... We noted as well that in their times there would be an award of valour, bravery and honour for the first soldier over a city walls as they were invading, here Paul turns it on its head because he is the first person to leave!

If that is the punchline of the joke Paul spent the previous verses leading up to it as he lists hardship after hardship, suffering after suffering, shipwrecks and situations, ways in which he has suffered for the Lord Jesus, for the sake of the gospel.

It deliberately reads like an 'anti-CV' as he subversively boasts in the wrong kind of things. This is what a life-long cross-centred ministry looks like.

Paul ends his 'CV' in v28 reminding us where the chapter began - of his intense love and care for local churches. Paul feels the intensity of both their suffering and their sin, as he longs to minister to them. We noted that this whole section in many ways outlines what a cross shaped life looks like as the people of God follow in the footsteps of Jesus, as they minister for him, and like him.

Here are some questions to get your group started

- Have a look back at the start of 1 Corinthians 2. Why do you think Paul chooses to dial down his speaking gifts? What is the principal behind this? How might this apply to us as we seek to reach our culture?
- What are some of the challenges or accusations that Paul is confronting in the first half of 2Cor 11?
- What is the striking conclusion in v13-14? How should we apply this?
- From v15 onwards, Paul challengingly begins to boast (though not in the way they would expect) in his ministry experiences. List some of the broad categories of hardship he encountered. How do they apply to us?

Please read "Caring for one Another" chapter 8.

Dan highlighted Paul's love for the Corinthians. We have been thinking through this book what that looks like in practice. In conclusion...

"God uses ordinary people and their increasingly wise, childlike, God-dependent conversations to build his church. These do not depend on our brilliance in order to be helpful; they depend on Jesus, his strength, our weakness, and our humble response to him."

What might be different on your conversations as a result of these studies?

What's next? What would help you to grow in these wise and helpful conversations?