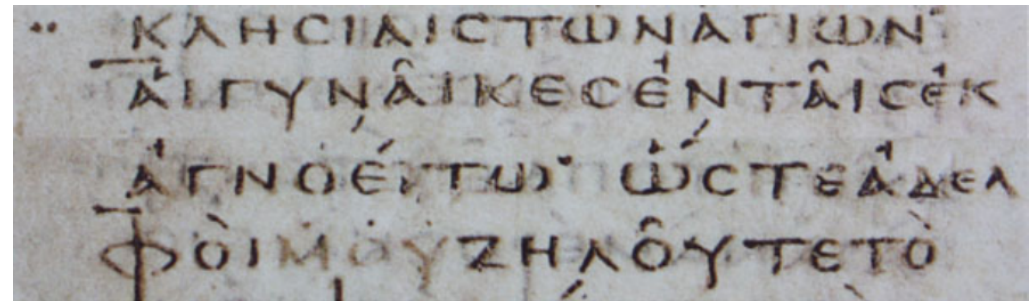


Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

2 Corinthians
part 2



Sunday 25th April – Friday 8th May

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Introduction

We continue with our journey through Paul's letters to the Corinthian Church spending the next few weeks in what we know as 2 Corinthians. Whilst scholars are clear that Paul wrote the letter there is a view that it's a compilation of at least two letters which later editors merged into one due to the change of tone between chapter 7 and 8. The situation in the church was still complicated, Paul asserts his apostleship and clearly sees that he's been attacked. We know that church conflicts can be messy and those in leadership often take the brunt of the pain. The letter encourages us that even when we get it wrong we're in good company!

Prayer

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself today the strong Name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three.
Of whom all nature hath creation, eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
praise to the Lord of my salvation, salvation is of Christ the Lord. Amen

Sunday 26th April Psalm 144

The Rev'd Ian Gow, Minister, Eltham URC.

1 All praise be given to the LORD,
Because he is a rock to me;
He trains my hands to fight in war,
To battle with the enemy.

2 My fortress and my loving God,
My saviour and defence is he;
He is my refuge and my shield,
Subduing peoples under me.

3 Lord, why should you take
note of man?
Why should you hold mankind
so dear?

4 For they are like a fleeting breath;
Their days like shadows disappear.

5 LORD, part your heavens
and come down;
So touch the mountains
that they smoke!

6 Send lightning, rout your enemies;
Shoot arrows, scatter all their folk.

7 Reach down your hand from
heaven on high;
From mighty waters rescue me.
8 Deliver me from foreign foes
Who speak and act deceitfully.

9 To God a new song I will sing;
I'll play on lyre a pleasing chord.

10 For you give victory to kings;
David you save from deadly sword.

11 Deliver me from hostile hands;
From foreign forces rescue me.
Their mouths are full of lying words;
Their right hands work deceitfully.

12 Then will our sons,
like nurtured plants,
From early youth grow
strong and tall;
Our daughters fair as pillars carved
To beautify a palace wall.

13 Our barns and stores
will then be filled
With harvests which our land
will yield;
Our sheep will multiply and grow
By tens of thousands in the field.

14 Our oxen will draw heavy loads;
Our walls will not be broken down.
We'll not be led away as slaves—
No cry of anguish in our town.

15 How bless'd are all the folk of whom

This is a true and faithful word!

How bless'd the people who can say,

“We have no God besides the LORD!”

Reflection

Throughout the aeons wars have been fought by nations with some preconception that their “god” was on their side and throughout my life’s ministry the pros and cons of war - exclusively those of World Wars I & II have been contested. “Churchill was a despotic dictator” (imprisoned Christian pacifist) and “the bombing of Hiroshima was both inevitable and necessary” (Christian elder).

In the Old Testament war was regarded as a holy conflict initiated and sanctified by God although glory in victory was later tempered by His judgement on His people for their sinful rejection of the covenant. This is reinforced in the New Testament where Jesus’ condemnation of war and his stress on peaceful love and reconciliation is only too apparent. However, Jesus also spoke of the inevitability and continuation of wars until His return and did not deny the right of earthly governments to maintain armies; hence the Christian adoption of the theories of Augustine and Aquinas on “Just War”.

Scholars remain divided both on the authorship of Psalm 144 and indeed, on David’s true historical status - i.e. an insignificant tribal chieftain, victorious in local skirmishes or the powerful biblical king who established the Israelite kingdom.

Psalm 144, traditionally ascribed to King David of the biblical House of David, is of fragmentary composition. However, the psalm’s poetic excellence and beauty of imagery are comparable to any other Davidic psalm. The opening verses (1-2) extol God as the warrior’s supreme protector (cf. Psalm 18.1-50) although His regard for mankind (cf. Psalm 8) - is held in awe. In verses 5 - 8 and 9 -11 supplications are made to the

Friday 8th May - 2 Corinthians 13: 11 - 13

The Rev’d Kevin Watson, Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Reflection – Future Proof!

So Paul signs off his letter. Soon I will be signing-off my ministry. It was 18 months ago, I clearly heard God warn me not to start any new plans or projects my successor would have to follow through – instead strengthen the team, and ensure this is a safe place for new things to happen once I have gone. I hope to heed Paul’s advice and put everything in good order. With all the diversity of views and opinions, we cannot agree with everyone, and may profoundly disagree, but we are bound in unity by Jesus.

Whenever we say our goodbyes, leave school or college, move house, change job, come out of hospital, we pray those we leave behind, or go separate ways, will be safe and well. This is summed up in the Hebrew word “Mizpah”, said as Jacob and Laban say goodbye, “May God watch over you!” Paul doesn’t just pray this is so, but knows it in his very being, that whatever happens, we will be safe in God’s hands! He knows it because he has received into his life “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.” I too know that all will be well as my life, and the life of the Church I leave behind changes again. This is why at every change of ministry I have asked to be sung “St. Patrick’s Breastplate”, the prayer of the saint, as a hymn written by Cecil Alexander. Receive these words and know your life is ‘future proof’.

never waste the opportunity to share some of this God-power, of which Paul speaks.

Do you really believe you can make a difference, as one of God's builders of the Kingdom of Love? Don't worry what others are doing, but as Paul says, look only at yourself, then compare with only one – Jesus Christ, boast of only one, Jesus Christ. This is what it is to be a disciple, a learner of Jesus. Look to what you are doing well, what you are good at. To encourage the Corinthians, Paul chooses a special word, only used once in Scripture. Where it says "you may become perfect" and can be translated "fully-qualified" I pray that you too receive it, written especially for you, that you too can be fully-qualified to be a disciple of Christ. You have heard the call to follow Jesus, you are on the apprenticeship, but now you are ready to let Jesus take full control and share with him the transforming of the world. Reporting for duty – present and correct! Since a teenager, I've been inspired, encouraged and challenged by Theodore Monod's hymn, I offer now:

Prayer

O the bitter shame and sorrow, that a time could ever be,
When I let the Saviour's pity plead in vain, and proudly answered,
"None of you, and all of me!"

Yet you found me; there I saw you, dying and in agony,
Heard you pray, 'Forgive them, Father!' and my wistful heart said faintly,
"Some of you, and some of me!"

Day by day your tender mercy, healing, helping, full and free,
Firm and strong, with endless patience, brought me lower, while I
whispered, "More of you, and less of me!"

Higher than the highest heaven, deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, your love at last hath conquered: grant me now my spirit's longing,
"All of you and none of me!"

Lord for courage, strength and victory in battle in return for the humble and worshipful adoration of God's Chosen Nation.

There never will be a consensus on the evils of war and without God, the present sight of wars, division and destruction are all there is to shape our belief and hope. But if, instead, we accept the fact and presence of God, Immanuel, with us, then we are led towards the future that God is bringing, just as he did in the past.

Prayer:

"Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home."

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) altd. based on Psalm 90.1-6

[Monday 27th April - 2 Corinthians 8: 1 - 15](#)

John Ellis, former Moderator of the General Assembly and Secretary of Capel United Church in Kent

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints — and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you — so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something— now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written,

‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’

Reflection

Paul has set himself a tough task: fund-raising from a church that feels it is not rich for a project from which they will see no benefit. As so often with fund-raising, it has turned into a long term project (see 1 Corinthians 16.1-4 for its history). Paul’s slight exasperation that the initial enthusiasm seems to have waned does not sound at all out of date.

The task is doubly difficult because the fund is not for the Corinthians’ exceptional organ or their roof or even their Messy Church but for some congregation in another country. Lacking television and Skype, the potential givers will never see pictures of the country concerned or ever meet, even electronically, any of the church members there. And given all the other topics he is arguing about with the Corinthians, why would Paul judge it a good idea to bring up the sensitive topic of giving?

If you receive a charity fund-raising appeal in the post today, you might like to compare it with Paul’s pitch. At least one of them will be deeply

Just a closer walk with Thee
Grant it, Jesus, if you please
Daily walking close to Thee
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be (Adapted)

[Thursday 7th May - 2 Corinthians 13: 5 - 10](#)

The Rev’d Kevin Watson, Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed. But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have passed the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Reflection – Present and Correct!

As a Synod moderator, I miss day to day living with a community of faith, responding to the Spirit’s prompting to speak the Word of Life people need to hear week by week, and the thrill of seeing Jesus Christ transforming individuals, families, even communities. I’ve sometimes felt cut off from where God’s mission is happening. Until I think of Paul. He went from church to church, for some only a fleeting visit, yet here he is in a deep, meaningful relationship with people he has only previously visited twice. Yet, what an impact he had on their lives. All Paul brought and shared with them was God’s love. In all their difficulties he keeps reminding them of this. So, never underestimate the influence we may have with everyone we encounter, even for a brief conversation, and

remembering his times with them, living with them, teaching, correcting their ways. Yes, he knows how the church has grown in faith and loving ways, but also that problems continue. He cares so much, and so stresses that he will need to show the tough and challenging love of God to ensure they don't fall back into bad habits, and need instead 'discipline' to build strong their community of faith.

Leaving a job, moving house, both of which we shall be doing soon; writing letters as Paul did, or meeting up with old friends are times to reflect on the past we've had together, and since we've been apart. This can hurt, as we are reminded of the shame of failures, regret of wrong choices, guilt of bad behaviour, fallings out, disappointments, and even if the past was wonderful, then feeling 'where has it all gone'? In all this brokenness and weakness – and there was plenty in Corinth, Paul shows how God helps us deal with our past, if only we can look further back in the past to what God has already done for us in Jesus crucified. The power of God's love that took Jesus to the cross, faced and conquered death is now at work in us to deal with all these things. This is God-power, the toughest of Love that knows no boundaries, nor limitations, and so can heal and restore all people and relationships. God isn't past caring for you. God cares for your past so much and offers now God-power to heal you and restore your life.

Prayer

Dear Lord,
I am weak but Thou art strong
keep me from all wrong
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk close to Thee

Thru this world of toils and snares
If I falter who cares?
Who with me the burden shares?
None but Thee, dear Lord.

theological. Paul's collection from his Gentile churches for the church in Jerusalem matters hugely to him as a demonstration that, amazingly, Jews and Gentiles are partners in the Church of Jesus Christ who can both give and receive from each other.

Even more remarkably, Paul's appeal brochure does not once mention money. He fails to attach a copy of the church accounts. He frames the whole argument in terms of God's grace to us and the echoes of that grace in the hearts of Christians.

Thank the Lord for hard-working Church Treasurers and especially for those who are shaped by grace.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for all the gifts you have given me.
Help me to use them generously today,
without growing proud of doing so.
Show me where I am still miserly.
Give wisdom, grown from grace,
to those entrusted to deploy the gifts of others.
Make me think more like you, who gave everything for me. Amen

[Tuesday 28th April - 2 Corinthians 8: 16 - 24](#)

The Rev'd Jacky Embrey, Moderator of Mersey Synod

But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus the same eagerness for you that I myself have. For he not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own accord. With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming of the good news; and not only that, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking] for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our goodwill. We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering, for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others. And with

them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore, openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

Reflection

Paul says that he is confident of the Corinthians' generosity, but he also spends two whole chapters of this letter making sure that they keep to their avowed intention to join in with the gift to the churches in Judea. He sees this 'generous undertaking' as being for the glory of God and to show off the goodwill of the more gentile churches towards Jerusalem. Paul and the other churches are even sending valued representatives to encourage the Corinthians in their giving. It's clear that Paul knows what he considers to be 'right' and equally that he's determined that his proteges, the Corinthians, will do what is right not only in God's sight, but in the sight of everyone.

Does it matter what our motivation is for doing the right thing, or even for preaching the right thing? If we do something because we think that we will look good in the sight of others, is that less valuable, than if we do it to honour God? After all, as Christians, if we do the right thing, for whatever reason, others will see what we do as the Christian path and that can only be positive.

Why, then, do I feel uncomfortable about doing the right thing, in order to get the approval of others? Is it because I owe so much to God, that I should be doing what God wants with no further reward? Or is it because we should aspire to having not only the mind of Christ to know what is right, but also the character of Christ to do what is right, even when that's not what we want, for whatever reason. Maybe this is splitting hairs. If we can discern the right thing to do and do it, then we will be honouring Christ, for that is what he did. (Matthew 26: 39).

Paul wants them to know that in coming to them, the only thing he is seeking, the only reason he wants to come at all, is so that he can be their servant.

Time for Paul to serve. The proof will be in the pudding! 'For what we are about to receive may we be truly thankful'.

Prayer

Gracious God when we feel weak, helpless, like nothing, and those around us don't get the truth that Christ brings, strengthen our hearts for your work.

When we are challenged to go to places we do not want to go, give us courage to follow where you are leading us.

Work in us and through us

to bring about the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Wednesday 6th May - 2 Corinthians 13: 1 - 4](#)

The Rev'd Kevin Watson, Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod

This is the third time I am coming to you. 'Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses.' I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient— since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

Reflection – Past Caring!

Do you ever feel people are past caring for you? Maybe even God has given up on you. Despite continued bad behaviour by his friends in Corinth, Paul hadn't given up on them, and nor had God. Paul is

beloved, is for the sake of building you up. For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practised.

Refection

What is Paul promising the Corinthians? Is his offer too good to be true after everything that has happened? Words from my Granddad come flooding back: 'There is no such thing as a free lunch' what should the community of Corinth expect from this offer? The answer is Jesus Christ! Paul tries to return to the place where he has been before and to turn things around as the cook would turn out my favourite pudding from Boys' Brigade Camp - pineapple upside down cake. The pineapple sits on the sponge and the syrup runs down. Paul doesn't expect anything (he is weak and this whole experience is making him feel like nothing). It's definitely time for the intake of the sugar and calories from the pudding. Paul wants to turn the community of believers 'upside down' - away from wrong teaching, and tell them the truth about the person of Jesus. If I (or you) were with Paul I would tell him, 'Don't do it', because they haven't got it. You founded the Church on your first visit and on the second visit you reflected on it and said: 'For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained' 2 Corinthians 2:2.

Why would you? 'I have been a fool! You forced me to it'. There is a boldness and confidence from Paul: 'I was not at all inferior to the super apostles'. (verses 5&6)

There are times in ministry when we might well say: 'You make me feel like nothing and I am the fool who returns to work with you.'

Prayer

Gracious God, we ask for the gift of discernment. Give us the mind of Christ to know what is right and the character of Christ to do what is right, however reluctantly. May the doing of what is right become a holy habit. as we learn to walk your way and aspire to live the life of Jesus today. Amen.

[Wednesday 29th April - 2 Corinthians 9:](#)

The Rev'd Bernie Collins, retired minister, member of Avenue St Andrews URC, Southampton, and convenor of the Assembly Mission Committee

Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever'

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Reflection

‘God loves a cheerful giver!’ But a basis of these two chapters (8 and 9) is that cheerfulness in giving comes through deep appreciation that God is the most cheerfully generous giver. And a core message of these two letters (1 and 2 Corinthians) is that God’s overflowing love is for all peoples, through the grace of Jesus Christ and the sharing of the Holy Spirit – so we are invited and expected to join in.

Useful as these verses and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 may have been for our churches to encourage weekly offerings, regular tithing or donations, Paul’s scheme was not designed to cover routine church expenses or new development projects.

Paul calls it ‘ministry (diakonia) to the saints’. In today’s verses 9:11-14 and Romans 15:25-27 he explains that, through their generosity enabled by God, and in company with people from other regions, they will meet financial needs of poor Christians in Jerusalem; they will cause the recipients to give thanks (eucharistia) to God which will mingle with the gratitude that motivated the givers and the bearers of the gifts; and they will lead these Jewish Christians to give glory to God because Gentile (other ethnic) Christians have proved their commitment by confessing

Prayer

God we pray for those afflicted by thorns:
grant them grace sufficient
that in tough times they may be given the strength they need.
We pray for ourselves – calling to mind the thorns that cause us pain:
grant us grace sufficient and in our weakness strengthen us
that we may remain faithful and hopeful.

We offer our prayer in the name of the One whose head was pierced by the crown of thorns. Amen.

[Tuesday 5th May - 2 Corinthians 12: 11 - 21](#)

The Revd Andrew Royal Minister Maidstone & Staplehurst URC’s

I have been a fool! You forced me to it. Indeed you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works. How have you been worse off than the other churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

Here I am, ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, because I do not want what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? Let it be assumed that I did not burden you. Nevertheless (you say) since I was crafty, I took you in by deceit. Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do,

hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Reflection

Would that Christian faith were a magic wand – such that merely to wave it over difficult and unwanted circumstances resulted in them being transformed as we would wish or, in some cases, disappear altogether. On a more virtuous day we might be prepared to limit their use to the improvement of other people’s lives rather than our own; more often than not, however, it would be tempting to use them for ourselves.

Would that life were a bed of roses – idyllic, sweet-smelling and beautiful – with no weeds or thorns. In our least self-centred moments we might be able to claim we wish it were such for other people; more often than not we long for our own lives to be such.

Faith is, of course, nowhere near being like a wand or a perfect bed of roses so it is refreshing and reassuring to learn, in today’s passage, that even St Paul was given “a thorn” rather than a wand. He speaks of appealing three times for the removal of the thorn but to no avail. Rather than the removal of the thorn he speaks of all-sufficient grace – enabling him to hold on rather than give up: an inner strength in the face of weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities.

In his book, “There Are No Strong People” (*), Jeff Lewis suggests, “There’s no such thing as a strong person. Only a person with strengths, who is strong in some areas. We all know that we all have weaknesses. But we are also weak because we are strong, because our strengths can become components in our weaknesses.” Similarly, St Paul writes that it is in his weakness that he finds strength – God’s strength rather than his own. Thorns remain but God’s grace can enable us to live with them.

(*) There Are No Strong People, Jeff Lewis, CWR 2012.

the gospel of Christ and generously sharing (koinonia) with them and all others.

What would be equivalent schemes today?

One might be: the kind of work boosted by URC General Assembly in 2016 to enable local churches, individuals and synods to respond to issues of the Israel/Palestine situation with informed prayer, grace and solidarity. Another: to share in the growth of understanding about persistent white privilege and black suffering in society and in church life, and work to achieve fairness and equity, mutual respect and dignity for all. The URC’s programme officer for global justice and partnerships can guide your interest or involvement in a range of existing and potential schemes.

Prayer

Bountiful God, we join in thanks for the blessings of your grace in Jesus Christ reaching out through all strands of humanity and every aspect of creation. Please inspire our participation in partnerships, to share the life of Christ in fullness for all, and to you be the glory. Amen.

[Thursday 30th April - 2 Corinthians 10:](#)

The Rev’d Colin Hunt, retired minister, worshipping at Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when I am away!— I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards. Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the

knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we. Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters. For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.' Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present.

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense. We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you. For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labours of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action. 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

Reflection

The Corinthians were not entirely happy with Paul. They felt that he was writing things from a distance that perhaps he was reluctant to say to them face to face. Unlike today's social media, there was not the opportunity to instantly reply, corresponding with someone some

Prayer

I will try harder to praise you my God and King,
Every week I will challenge myself
to mention your name to my friends and colleagues,
for you are worthy of praise
because of who you are and what you give to us,
give us courage and confidence to praise you in our own way,
in order to reflect the mark you make in our lives
and seek to make in this world. Amen

[Monday 4th May 2 Corinthians 12: 1 - 10](#)

The Rev'd Geoffrey Clarke, is Moderator of East Midlands Synod and a member of St. Andrew's with Castle Gate United Reformed Church, Nottingham

It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults,

21 My lips will frame a psalm of thanks to God;
My mouth will speak for ever in his praise.
Let every creature magnify the LORD,
And praise his holy name now and always.

Reflection

Praise is the theme of this passage; the verses express the importance of praise and rejoicing in all that the Lord has done for us. The verses describe basking in the Lord's goodness; appreciating His power; enjoying His abundant grace; benefitting from His mighty acts and receiving His love and protection.. all good stuff.

I am familiar with the first few verses of the passage and have been repeatedly drawn to them as they remind me of the importance of ensuring we verbalise how appreciative we are of all that God is. In reality, I find it easier to express my joy and gratitude (ie praise) to fellow Christians; but increasingly I am challenging myself to verbalise praise to others outside of church eg by mentioning that I am a church goer, referencing Jesus or God or by recounting the latest 'hot' topics that the talented children at my church are debating, including: Trump, Brexit, and Climate Change. I am very aware that this gets a reaction from those who do not know what part faith plays in my life and I like to think of it as my way of offering praise.

I really believe that we should all try to express praise in whatever way fits our personality and circumstances, but the key thing is that we do do it and by doing this, we are offering a personal 'Thank you' to the Almighty and also touching lives in the process.

It makes me smile to think that even my little niece in Ghana (as a result of absorbing all the faith-speak around her) responds to a "How are you?" by saying, "By HIS grace, I'm fine"; now if a 5 year old can express praise in this way, I have no excuse not to try harder.

distance away could take weeks if not months to arrive. In response to their criticism, Paul highlights two thoughts with a view to clarifying what his message is really about. His message emphasises two qualities, that of gentleness and the reasonableness of God.

By gentleness, Paul meant the difference between extreme anger being never ever angry at all. I was once described by a member of a congregation as being never angry and so laid back that if I were ever more laid back then I would probably fall over. Clearly they did not really know me. Paul is emphasising the difference between never being angry at a personal wrong, but expressing righteous anger against wrongs that affect the lives of others. In today's world that anger might be against political leaders or large companies who think they have the right to ride roughshod over the weakest and poorest, Paul further develops his message by emphasizing another quality, that of distinguishing between justice and true love. I am surprised that he did not remind them of chapter thirteen of his first letter to them where he defines such true love. How often is it that each of us fall short of that quality of love?

Prayer

Forgiving God, we think we have all the answers when in reality we don't. We think that our ways are the only correct ways when more often than not we are completely wrong. Give us, we pray, open hearts and minds, open to your will rather than ours. Make us more sensitive to the needs and views of others so that our attentiveness to their situations reflect the qualities of your love to all, in Jesus name. Amen

[Friday 1st May - 2 Corinthians 11: 1 - 15](#)

The Rev'd Jacky Embrey, Moderator of Mersey Synod

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that

as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.

Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about. For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds.

Reflection

It can be very frustrating to hear one side of a conversation, especially if all you can hear is, 'oh, no!' or 'great!' My husband and I often put family phone calls on speakerphone to solve that problem, but we can't do that with Paul. We only have one side of the conversation, and we may not even have all of that.

8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate;
He's slow to anger, rich in steadfast love.

9 The LORD is good to all that he has made,
And merciful to all on earth that move.

10 All you have made will give you praise, O LORD;
Your saints will all unite to bless your name.

11 The glory of your reign they will declare,
And your surpassing might they will proclaim.

12 Thus all will hear about your mighty acts
And know the glorious splendour of your reign.

13 Your kingdom will endure for evermore;
For all time your dominion will remain.

The LORD is faithful to his promises;
To all that he has made his love is shown.

14 The LORD himself upholds all those who fall
And lifts up everyone who is bowed down.

15 All eyes are raised expectantly to you,
And in due season you supply their food.

16 You open wide your hand to all that live
And satisfy their needs with what is good.

17 The LORD is just and good in all his ways;
He shows his love to all that he has made.

18 The LORD is near to all who call on him,
To all who call in truth to him for aid.

19 The hopes of those who fear him he fulfils;
He hears their cry and saves them from distress.

20 The LORD protects all those who love his name,
But slays all those who practise wickedness.

Prayer

God, you who called Paul and took his life into strange and dangerous turns, who encouraged and sustained him in the hardest and harshest of times, work your way with us.

Take our lives today.

Encourage and sustain us in the good and the dangerous moments.

In our broken world and hurting communities,
make us missionaries of good news and gospel grace.

In the name of him whom Paul served, only Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sunday 3rd May Psalm 145

Alexandra Priddy (nee Bediako), Elder and Children's Church Leader,
Trinity Mill Hill URC

1 I will exalt you, O my God and King;
For ever I will praise your holy name.
2 I will extol your name for evermore;
Day after day your praise I will proclaim.

3 Great is the LORD, most worthy of all praise;
His greatness none can search or comprehend.
4 Each generation will recount your deeds
And to the next your mighty acts commend.

5-6 They praise the splendour of your majesty,
The power of the works that you have done.
I too will meditate upon your deeds,
And your majestic acts I will make known.

7 They will rejoice in your benevolence,
And your abundant grace they'll celebrate;
The righteousness that you have shown to them
In praise and joyful song they will relate.

We can never know exactly what the false apostles were preaching. Some commentators think that they may have been knocking a few of the rough edges off the Gospel, making it more palatable for refined appetites and something worth paying for. Perhaps the ugliness, shame and pain of the Cross were being downplayed, and consequently the love and grace of God were also being downplayed, together, possibly, with the need for that grace.

It's a tendency that has continued down the years. We like to advertise what we see as the positives of our faith, but sometimes without reference to the costs. Or we emphasise the cost to Christ, but fail to mention that Christ's love calls for a costly response. It's the gospel of the softly lit Christmas scene, with Mary serene, Jesus clean and smiling and Joseph unruffled, moments after an unplanned birth, in a dark and dirty stable, surrounded by smelly animals.

That's not a gospel fit for the dirty, smelly, too often unpalatable world in which we live. We need God with us in the worst of times and circumstances, as well as the best. So, let's listen to Paul and welcome the Gospel he preached in its entirety, despite the horror of the Cross at its centre, the seeming impossibility of the resurrection, and the response that such love demands of us.

Prayer

Living and Loving God, from birth to death,
Jesus knew the reality of our humanity.
As we live that reality, may we know him by our sides.
As our world and its people struggle with the totality of that reality,
may the gospel in all its starkness and love be both support and
salvation. Thanks be to God. Amen

The Rev'd Neil Thorogood, Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge

I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool; but if you do, then accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool; since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast. For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he for ever!) knows that I do not lie. In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas set a guard on the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, [h] and escaped from his hands.

Reflection

By this stage of the letter Paul is deeply involved in defending himself. His legitimacy is questioned. Legitimacy matters, especially if someone is representing a wider cause. Paul has brought the Gospel. Now he has to defend his right and worthiness and calling to have done so.

Can Paul truly defend his position as a follower of Jesus worthy of respect and attention? It seems that Paul's opponents are questioning his Hebrew credentials. Scattered across a wide area, many of Paul's contemporary Jews may well have spoken Greek and been far less adept with Hebrew in its Aramaic form. Perhaps Paul's origins are equally diluted? No, he counters. Again, accusations of being neither an Israelite nor a descendant of Abraham seem to have been made. Both, again, might tend to demote Paul in the eyes of some and challenge his status as one from the heart and home of the people of God. Again, Paul claims his true status as Israelite and Abraham's descendant. His status is as secure as any other apostle's. His teaching, therefore, deserves equal attention.

But there is more. Another mark of the truth of Paul's position is the strength and ferocity of the attacks he has endured for the sake of the Gospel. It is quite a list: five times he has received the Jewish punishment of being flogged 39 times (see Deuteronomy 25: 1-3); three times he has been beaten with rods, a Roman punishment; once he was stoned; three times shipwrecked. The writing becomes a cascade of "danger"; a crescendo of risks endured. Hanging over it all is Paul's unspoken challenge: If I am not truly a faithful apostle, why would I face all of this? What of us? Few of us are likely to have many of Paul's credentials ticked. We live in different times. We face different challenges. But this passage is worth lingering over. What are my credentials as a follower of Jesus Christ? How does my life carry evidence of my discipleship? What proof could I offer of my devotion? What does faith cost me?