

Despite Paul's anguish in dealing with the Corinthian church, in this part of his letter, he just spills over with praise for God...

So, let's set the scene: Paul is reminiscing about his stop-over in Troas, which was a very anxious time for him.

He was waiting there (in Troas) hoping that Titus would catch-up with him there. Earlier, he'd sent Titus on to Corinthⁱ, to collect the offering that was to be forwarded on to Jerusalem) ,, But I think he's really itching to hear back from Titus, "Just how things **are**, in Corinth,, And how they responded to the severe letter that he'd sent to them..." (do they love me? Or do they love me not?...)

But, alas, Titus didn't arrive in time, and so even though people were responding to the Gospel (there in Troas), Paul's spirit wasn't at rest. He wasn't in a very good personal state for preaching. He was anxiously waiting to hear from Titus, but Titus must've already gone on to Macedonia, and so Paul did the same.

Alright, so at this point, Paul was filled with anxiety – he's got this 'unsettled spirit'... He's got all this angst going on in Corinth:

- people trying to pull him down; and
- they're trying to undermine his position as an Apostle,, but despite all this, he just bursts into praise...

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ **always** leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

When a Roman army won a great victory, it was common for them to hold a great triumphal procession... Most often, it would be the Emperor who would lead the way. And the Generals and soldiers would follow him in great victory... And they'd burn incense as worship to their gods – It was a great celebration...

But not everybody was quite so excited at these events... Within the procession, would also be paraded, the prisoners of war... If the defeated king managed to survive, he'd probably be there in chains (or, if he didn't, they might have his head on a stick)... And many of those POW's were destined to be executed...

*And so, for those who were on the **winning** side, it was a parade of life and victory... But, for those who'd been defeated, it was the very smell of death.*

And this is the imagery that Paul is using here...

God, leads us in **His** victory. (It's not our victory – it's God's victory). How did this victory come about? Through Christ – through His death and resurrection...

And the reason that it's not our victory, is because when He actually won that victory, we were **enemies** of God... But through Christ, and through His resurrection victory, those

who put their faith in Him and yield to Him as Lord – well they're not His enemies any longer – they become his loyal subjects. And we can join in the triumphal parade...

And Paul says, “and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. He’s talking about preaching the Gospel. *Think about the parade, with the loyal subjects proclaiming the great victory of the king.* Wherever Paul and Titus and his fellow missionaries went, the fragrance of knowing God, was being spread everywhere... Wherever they went, they preached the Gospel, and wherever the Gospel was preached, people would know about Christ...

Now, to those who **respond** to the Gospel; who believe in Jesus; and who are being saved, the aroma of the Gospel is like a sweet smell... It’s the message that gives us life. He actually says “**life to life**” – a full life now (life is pretty empty without God in it), and an eternal life – that’s what it means to have life in Christ (now and eternally), and so among those who are being saved, the gospel is the sweet smell from life to life...

But sadly, for many, when they hear the Gospel, it isn't the smell of sweetness, and it isn't the smell of life... , because when **they** hear the Gospel, their hearts are hardened,, and they reject Christ,, and for them, the Gospel becomes the putrid smell of death...

And we’ve all seen this in people haven’t we... When some people hear the Gospel, it’s just the best news ever...

But for the vast majority - - - they hate it...

I don't know how some people can hate something they don't believe in, as much as they do... Paul refers to these as "those who are perishing"...

In my shed, I've got a tin cupboard, with a bunch of spare parts and specialty tools in it... And there's a section there for pushbike parts... And anybody who's ever ridden pushbikes in St George, knows all about our goat-head problem... Anyway, that means I carry a number of spare tubes... But it's very important that I use the older tubes first, because, even though they're not being used, over time, tubes perish...

And so, you might think you've got a pristine tube in a box, and you open it up, and it's all cracked, and it's just falling to bits... Over time, it just gets destroyed...

And without Christ, that's the human condition... Those who are **with** Christ, are being saved. Those who are **without** Christ, are perishing... But the Greek word here, is even stronger than that: ἀπολλυμένοις, (apollymenois), is about death – it's about destruction, which is why he says: that among those who are perishing, the Gospel is a fragrance from death to death.

Before they hear the Gospel, they're not saved, because they haven't yielded to Jesus as Lord. But then they hear the

Gospel message, that without Christ, they will perish... But their heart hardens, and they reject Christ again, and so they confirm their destiny... **Among those who are perishing, the Gospel is a fragrance from death to death.**

The Gospel – The pure Gospel – The pure Good News of Jesus, isn't very palatable to many... And so the Gospel message that is preached, becomes a test of the genuineness of the preacher...

What Paul's saying here, is "Even though the Gospel is 'good news', the true gospel is 'pretty-much' 'on-the-nose' for most people." And so the temptation for preachers (not only today, but forever), has been to **change** the Gospel, or to not preach the **full** gospel – it's to make the gospel more listener-friendly for a self-absorbed and self-centred population – the temptation is to remove the offence of the Gospel...

Paul says: ¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

You know what a peddler is, hey... :- It's someone who's trying to sell stuff, to make a profit. And so, the image that he's conjuring up here, is about preachers, who might be in it for the money; or they might be in it for the glory... Being a peddler of God's word, gives the implication of "deceptiveness" and "greedy motives"...

The temptation is to “just tweak the Gospel a little bit”, so it’s not quite so offensive... - just change the Gospel a bit, so that it’s:

- more appealing; or
- not quite so judging;
- people won’t be put off by having to repent of certain actions/lifestyles
- make it sound ‘more inclusive’
- concentrate more about the benefits for the listener than, than the Lordship of Christ

Just change it a bit, so that it’s **not** the aroma of death to those who are perishing...

And there’s plenty of peddlers of God’s word around, even today – pastors who will tell half-truths, to try and build their church; preachers who re-define what it means to repent; and there’s those who present a wide, easy way to get to God, when the true way of a disciple of Jesus, is a narrow, hard road...

But Paul and his missionary mates aren’t like that – they’re not shameless peddlers of God’s word... He says: We’re **men of sincerity**; they’re **commissioned by God**; and in the sight of **God, we speak in Christ**.

If you think back to the introduction (last week), in Corinth there were some antagonists. Paul sarcastically refers to them as the “super-apostles”... And Paul’s comparing himself to them... They’re just peddlers of God’s word – they’re deceptive – and they’re in it, for their own gain...

But we're not like that:

- We're sincere;
- We didn't hang up a shingle and decide to go into business (as apostles) ourselves – God **chose** us; God **called** us; God **commissioned** us...
- And Paul is **very** aware, that every time they preach the Gospel, the one who's keeping an eye on them, is God...
in the sight of God, we speak in Christ

As a preacher, and as a Bible teacher, what I teach, matters – it matters a lot... You know, in churches, we talk about having “oversight” – who makes sure the message that's preached is the Full Gospel, and that it hasn't been watered down...

Do you know what motivates me to preach the Gospel, and keep the Gospel true???

1. I love Christ, and I love His Gospel;
2. I speak **in** Christ. I have no natural ability to do this
3. It is with fear and trembling that I preach the word of God, because every time I preach, God is listening, and God is watching...

And so, I preach Christ...

This is a very heavy responsibility... And in V16, Paul asks the question, “**Who is sufficient for these things?**”

And that's a valid question to ask... Even those who are perishing, ask that question...

The media have been keeping an eye on Israel Folau, and every time he preaches something that reminds people of the fact that God will judge unrepentant sinners, they ask a very similar question, “Who are you? Who do you think you are, preaching stuff like that???”

And let me tell you, for myself as a preacher and as a Bible teacher, I often find **myself** asking this question, “Who am I?” “What gives me the right to preach the Gospel?” “What gives me the right to warn sinners about the coming day of judgment, and to offer them the Good News, that Jesus saves?” “What gives me the right to interpret difficult passages of Scripture, and to try and help people to understand it?”

Who is sufficient for these things?

And it’s not until we get to Chapter 3, that Paul gives the answer: We in ourselves, **aren’t** sufficient – our sufficiency is from God...

But we’re jumping ahead of ourselves here... Let’s go back...

He said:

- We’re not like peddlers of God’s word (deceitful; greedy)
- Men of sincerity;
- Commissioned by God; and
- We speak Christ, in the sight of God (God is keeping a check on us)

But then he realises how that must sound... “**3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?** Alright, “Are we blowing our own trumpet?”

How can we tell if a preacher / teacher / pastor, are genuine?

- Truly are, men of sincerity;
- Not peddlers of God’s word (deceitful / half-truths / in it for the power/prestige/money)
- Genuinely commissioned by God / or whether they’ve decided to take it upon themselves; and
- That they **are** preaching the true Gospel???

Well, Paul says, “**Do we need letters of recommendation to you or from you?**”

No, he doesn’t rely on a letter of recommendation. He says, “**You are our letter of recommendation**”.

You see:

- a reference from somebody else, doesn’t prove that someone’s
 - sincere;
 - called by God; and
 - will preach the Gospel truth;
- a bachelors degree; Masters; Doctorate doesn’t prove that someone’s
 - sincere;
 - called by God; and
 - will preach the Gospel truth;

- Certainly a Facebook profile; LinkedIn; Who's who, aren't the evidence we need...

How can we tell the genuineness of a preacher???

Well, we look for the fruit... Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognise them"...

Matthew 7:¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

And biblically, the fruit that He's talking about here, is the fruit of the Spirit – He's talking about a life being changed and transformed, to be a life of righteousness...

But Paul takes this one step further ... If you want to assess the calling of preacher: Are they sincere? Are they called by God? - well, what's the fruit of his congregation???

Paul says, "What's the proof of our calling?", look at you – you're our letter of recommendation... you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not

with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Transformed lives – there's the evidence of the calling...

Now obviously, we're not just talking about how one or 2 people in the congregation are going with God, but how is the church as a whole???

Through the preaching of that pastor:

- Is that church getting closer to God? Or is it getting further away?
- Are they holding firm to the Gospel? Or are they wavering?
- Are its members becoming purer and holier? Or are they embracing sin and taking on the ways of the world?
- What's their language like? Are their words Godly? Or are they profane?
- Are they personally witnessing for Jesus? Or are they keeping it all very private?
- Are they loving the unlovable and caring for the poor and the sick? Or are they focusing more on their own financial well-being?
- Is that church a church who love God's word and trust God's word – do they delight in reading God's word and hearing good teaching? Or does God's word take a back seat to entertaining stories or philosophy

How a church is growing closer to God, or getting further away, says a lot about a pastor...

But here's the thing:

When a church **is** growing spiritually, it's not because the pastor is great – it's entirely the work of God, through His Holy Spirit...

You know, I've said to a few of you before, *“Being a pastor's a tough gig... If things are going good: God has done it. And if things are going bad, it's my fault.”*

When a church is growing spiritually, it's not because the pastor is great – it's entirely the work of God, through His Holy Spirit... There's no room for boasting in the church...

Paul says:

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now, that paragraph that we end on today, is going to be the launch-pad for what we're going to talk about next week – the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant – the old way of the letter of the Law, and the new way of the Spirit of Christ...

So, we'll study that more next week, but I needed to include this paragraph to finish us up today...

How are any of us sufficient???

Now, as I wrote this message, I obviously considered, “How am I sufficient to be a pastor – to be a teacher???” But you might be asking yourself the question:

- What makes me sufficient to be a Sunday School teacher;
- RE teacher;
- Worship leader;
- Elder;
- Bible study leader;
- Sufficient to share the Gospel with an unbeliever;
- Argue the validity of our faith with an antagonist?

Our sufficiency; Your sufficiency; my sufficiency,,,,, is from God...

Those whom God calls, God equips... And while we remain in Him, and obediently hold to Him and His word, and love Him,,, He's sufficient...

There will be times that you feel:

- “I'm not worthy;
- I'm not qualified;
- I'm not smart enough;
- I don't know enough;
- I'm too sinful;
- I'm not holy enough...

And I want to affirm you in all of that – you're right.

- Not worthy
- Not qualified
- Not smart enough
- Don't know enough
- Are too sinful
- Aren't holy enough

And neither am I...

I'm not sufficient. I'm not up to the task, but God is.

You're not sufficient either, but God is...

And in that knowledge – in the knowledge that we are completely unworthy and incapable,,,,, but fully trusting in the capability of God, let's be:

- People of integrity and sincerity;
- Recognise that we're commissioned by God; and
- Speak in Christ, in the sight of God

Let's do that...