

**Down But Not Out**  
**2 Corinthians 2:14**  
**Part 6**

Let me begin by saying this: A vibrant and fruitful Christian walk is a death march in which the marcher repeatedly dies day after day after day.

It is a march that was pioneered by Christ and it is a march that the Apostle Paul himself chose to embrace. We see this clearly stated by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:31** when he told the Corinthians that he died daily.

And it is a march that we must embrace as well if we desire to be identified with Christ and with the community of the redeemed. Let me read for you the words of Christ in **Luke 9:23**. **“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.”**

Christ never indicated that becoming one of His followers and becoming a part of this **“death march”** would be easy. No! It will never be easy. It certainly will be better, this is true, but it will never be easy.

We, or in other words, those who have chosen to follow Christ will inevitably suffer as we day after day after day continuously seek to live, not for ourselves but for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, putting our interests aside so that His interests and His purposes might be advanced in this world.

And if we have, in fact, chosen this path and are indeed one of His followers, we have become a part of a procession, a procession of death marchers. This sounds rather morbid doesn't it? But it isn't.

Perhaps the world may see it as such but I can't think of any procession that I would rather be more a part of than this procession. For there has never been nor will there ever be in the history of this world a more glorious or triumphal procession than this particular procession, for in this procession the captives of Christ, or in other words, the “death marchers” who have been subdued by Christ are put on display before the whole world as trophies of His divine grace. To be a part of this procession is not something to be spurned but rather embraced enthusiastically and even joyfully for it

testifies to ourselves and others that we are truly the disciples of Christ and most certainly heaven bound.

Let me read for you **1 Peter 4:12-14**. “**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; (13) but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. (14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because [What?] the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**” So let me ask you a question. Is being a part of this procession of death marchers such a bad thing? No! It is a glorious thing, for not only does it testify to us that we are, in fact, a trophy of God’s grace, but it also puts triumph over us on full display.

And this thought brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to our study of **2 Corinthians 2:12-17**, which we began last week.

So, what is the question that we introduced last week that we are seeking to answer? What do we learn from the Apostle Paul about **ministry** in **2 Corinthians 2:12-17** that will help us persevere when faced with difficulties?

And what was the first thing we learned? We learned from the Apostle Paul that no matter how gifted we might be as a minister, the stresses, strains, and disappointments of ministry will at times become overwhelming (2 Corinthians 2:12-13).

Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**. “**Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, (13) I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.**” So how did Paul in these two verses communicate to us that no matter how gifted we might be as a minister the stresses, strains, and disappointments of ministry will at times become overwhelming?

Paul communicated this particular lesson by giving us insight into an intense personal struggle that he himself endured while in Troas that did, in fact,

overwhelm him, a struggle that was associated with his ministry to the Corinthians. And how intense was this struggle?

It was so intense that Paul, out of concern for the Corinthians, turned his back on the door that God had opened for him in Troas in an attempt to intercept Titus in Macedonia. And why would he do this? He did this so that he might be able to hear from Titus how the Corinthians were doing. In fact, the struggle became so intense that later in this epistle, in **2 Corinthians 7:6**, Paul indicated to his readers that while he was in Macedonia he had become depressed. Ministry is not easy and it will certainly at times become overwhelming!

So, what else can we learn from the Apostle Paul about ministry from **2 Corinthians 2:12-17**? We can also learn that the sufferings that we endure as the captives of Christ in the performance of our ministry is the means by which His triumph over us is put on display (2 Corinthians 2:12-17).

So where do we see this? Let us once again read **2 Corinthians 2:12-13** but this time let us go a little bit further and read just the very first part of **2 Corinthians 2:14**. **“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, (13) I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. [And then it says] (14) But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”** So how do these last few words at the beginning of **verse 14** communicate to us that though the stresses and strains of ministry may at times cause us to suffer, it also provides God the opportunity to display us as trophies of His grace? It is through the imagery that Paul created by the using of a particular Greek word that is translated in our NAS Bibles as **“leads us in triumph in Christ.”** And what is this particular Greek word? It is the word **“THRIAMBEUOMAI.”**

The Greek verb, “THRIAMBEUOMAI,” is a very technical word and literally means, “to lead in triumph,” and conjures up a picture of a triumphal procession. So, what kind of triumphal procession might Paul want his readers to envision? I don't believe that there can be any doubt about the kind of triumphal procession that he had in mind.

The triumphal procession that Paul envisioned in 2 Corinthians 2:14 would have conjured up the triumphal processions that were characteristic of the

Romans. So, what were these processions like? They were designed to be the greatest show on earth displaying the power and the might of the Roman Empire and its complete mastery of the world and everyone and everything in it.

Let me share with you a short account of just one of these great processions recorded for us by a man named Appian. This particular procession was to celebrate Pompey's victories in Asia and was, in fact, his third such procession and he had himself personally enjoyed in Rome.

**In the triumphal procession were two-horse carriages and litters laden with gold or other ornaments of various kinds, also the son of Hystaspes, the throne and scepter of Mithridates Eupator himself, and his image, eight cubits high, made of solid gold, and 75,100,000 drachmas of silver coin; also an infinite number of wagons carrying arms and beaks of ships, and a multitude ... of captives, none of them bound, but all arrayed in their native costumes.**

Truly this triumphal procession was spectacular and certainly would catch the eye of anyone who was in Rome to behold it.

And Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:14** is clearly identifying himself, along with those like him, with that kind of triumphal procession. What did Paul say at the very beginning of verse 14? He said, **“But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”** Or perhaps better understood, **“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumphal procession in Christ.”**

So let me ask you this question. How did Paul see himself in respect to this triumphal procession that he is picturing for us in **2 Corinthians 2:14**?

When Paul pictured for us God's triumphal procession in 2 Corinthians 2:14, he did not see himself as a conquering soldier but rather as a conquered subject (Colossians 2:15).

Now I know that this perspective might be somewhat shocking for you to hear, but the application can be even more shocking. And why is this? The application can be even more shocking because after the captives were

paraded through the streets of Rome in these triumphal processions that they would then be put to death as a sacrifice to the Roman gods when the procession was over. And I believe this is how Paul wanted us to see him in relationship to the triumphal procession that he referred to in **2 Corinthians 2:14**.

When Paul identified himself in God's triumphal procession as a conquered subject rather than a conquering soldier, he, in effect, identified himself with someone being led to death (2 Corinthians 4:8-12).

And I believe that this particular interpretation is confirmed for us when we consider the way Paul used this same Greek word in the only other place that it is found in the New Testament. And that is in **Colossians 2:15** where God, having conquered the rulers of this age, has led them in triumphal procession as a public display of their destruction. Therefore it should not surprise us at all that Paul would choose to use this very same word to describe our relationship to the triumphal procession that Paul is alluding to in **2 Corinthians 2:14**.

Scott Haffemann (whose doctrinal thesis was centered on this text) concurred with this interpretation when he said, **“Paul’s metaphor in 2:14 may be “decoded” as follows: As the enemy of God’s people, God had conquered Paul at his conversion call on the road to Damascus and was now leading him, as a “slave of Christ” (his favorite term for himself as an apostle), to death in Christ, in order that Paul might display or reveal the majesty, power and glory of God, his conqueror.”**

This interpretation I believe is most consistent with the overall theme of 2 Corinthians as well as the specific expressions that Paul recorded for us in this epistle. Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 4:8-12**. **“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; (10) always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (11) For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (12) So death works in us, but life in you.”**

So now let me ask you a question. If Paul **in 2 Corinthians 2:14** is, in fact, identifying himself with someone who is being led to death, why is he filled with praise? It is rather quite simple.

Paul is able to be filled with praise, even though he sees himself being continually delivered over to death as a captive of Christ, because he knows this is the means by which God's triumph over Him in Christ is displayed.

May God give us the grace in our death march as the captives of Christ to give Him praise knowing that our sufferings is the means by which His triumph over us in Christ is put on display.