

**Down But Not Out**  
**2 Corinthians 2:16-17**  
**Part 8**

If we are a disciple of Christ and are, in fact, seeking to follow Him, we will desire to minister to people. This is a given and I would hope that every person here this morning is seeking to do this very thing.

And what should we expect as we do this? Certainly there will be times of great joy but there will be other times when this will not be true at all. In fact, there may be times when things get so difficult that we might be tempted to just quit. But hopefully rather than quitting we will find a way to persevere.

And this brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to our study of **2 Corinthians 2:12-17**. And what is the question that we have been 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?

First of all, 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.”**

Clearly based on these verses Paul was struggling while in Troas. And how intense was the 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 order to travel to Macedonia in the hope that he might intercept Titus and be able to hear how the church at Corinth was doing spiritually. But when Paul arrived in

Macedonia and still did not find Titus, **2 Corinthians 7:6** indicates that he became so upset that he was depressed.

Ministry is not easy and may well at times become overwhelming! But let us not allow these emotional hiccups to become bigger than need to be. If we are going to follow in the footsteps of Christ and commit our lives to ministry to people this will inevitably happen. It comes with the territory and it will happen even to the most mature disciples. It happened to Paul.

So in light of this let us rather than focusing on the stresses, strains, and disappointments of ministry, that from time to time may cause us to become discouraged, let us choose rather to focus on how God is using these afflictions, that will invariably come to glorify Him.

And this leads us to the second thing we learned about ministry from the Apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:12-17** that will help us persevere in ministry. So what is that?

We also learned 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 2:14).

And where do we see this particular truth? Let us now go to **2 Corinthians 2:14** and read the very first part of the verse and what does it say? **“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.”**

Yes, Paul was knocked down in **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**, but he was not knocked out. For we see Paul, at the first part of **2 Corinthians 2:14**, praising God. And why was he able to do this? He was able to do this because even in the midst of all that he had suffered as an apostle, even in the midst of his discouragement, he was able to lift his head up and see God leading him and his companions in triumph in Christ. And what did he mean by this?

The meaning of this verse comes alive for us when we recognize the word that Paul chose to use in **2 Corinthians 2:14** that is translated, **“Leads us in triumph.”** It is a very technical word that pictures for us a Roman triumphal procession that would take place after a great military victory, a procession that would not only display all the treasures that the Romans had secured but

their captives as well, captives that would, in fact, be very shortly put to death.

And this is exactly how Paul, I believe, wanted us to see him. Not as a captive of Rome but rather as a captive of Christ, who in dying to himself daily was being led by God in His triumphal procession. And hopefully this is how we would want to view ourselves.

And what should this produce in us, if we like Paul are able to view ourselves in this way in the midst of the stresses, strains, and disappointments of ministry? It should produce praise knowing that the suffering that has come upon us as we have sought to minister in the name of Christ is, in fact, the very means that God uses to display his conquest over us in Christ before the world. This is not a bad thing. This is a good thing.

We as the captives of Christ should not be concerned about pleasing ourselves but Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and at no time is this attitude most clearly displayed than when we as the captives of Christ are willing to suffer difficulties in seeking to do the ministries of Christ in the name of Christ.

But this is not the only thing we have learned about ministry from the Apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:12-17** that will help us persevere in ministry. There was a third and final thing that we considered. So what was that?

We also learned that when God is leading us as the captives of Christ in His triumphal procession we will have a profound and widespread impact (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). Why will we have such a profound impact? We will have a profound impact because if we as the captives of Christ in God's triumphal procession will choose to die to ourselves daily for the purpose of releasing the life of Christ and disseminating the message of Christ the sweet aroma of knowledge of God and the fragrance of Christ will emanate from us and will impact every person that we choose to engage whether they like it or not. This is absolutely guaranteed.

We saw this in last week as we considered the latter half of **verse 14** down through the first half of **verse 16**.

So now let me once again read for you this particular section of verses beginning in the latter half of **verse 14**. **“And manifests through us [or in other words, manifests through us as the captives of Christ who are being led by God in His triumphal procession] the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. (15) For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; (16) to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.”**

Will we as the captives of Christ, while being led by God in His triumphal procession, have an impact on those whom we choose to engage as the ambassadors of Christ and as ministers of reconciliation? How could we not in light of the fact that Paul compares us to an aroma of the knowledge of God and the fragrance of Christ? Aromas and fragrances are intrusive and will have an impact on the space that they occupy.

Hopefully this is what we have been for those who have come into your life this past week. Hopefully we have been the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God and the fragrance of Christ to them as we, in dying to ourselves daily, have been the channel of Christ’s life and message.

But Paul said more about our very strategic role as the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God and the fragrance of Christ than what I was able to cover last week and this morning I would like to finish Paul’s thought.

And what is my hope for this morning message? My hope for this morning message is that as we are once again reminded of our very strategic role in God’s eternal plan of being the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God and the sweet fragrance of Christ that we will not shrink away from it but will come to understand this morning that we are more than adequate in Christ to fulfill this very important and vital role in the lives of those that God brings across our path.

So now in light of this let us go back to our text and start reading where we left off in our study and read the latter half of **verse 16** through **verse 17**. **“And who is adequate for these things? (17) For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.”**

We have been given a very strategic role in God's eternal plan. We have been sent out into this world in order to be the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God and the sweet fragrance of Christ. And apart from us no one else can perform this role. But are we ready for it in light of our many weaknesses and shortcomings?

This morning as we examine this particular portion of our text I believe we will, in fact, discover that we, even in spite of our weakness and shortcomings, are exceedingly adequate for these things. So let us begin by looking at the question that Paul asked at the end of **2 Corinthians 2:16**. **“And who is adequate for these things?”**

So, what was Paul referring to when he spoke of **“these things?”** Paul was referring to the very things that he had just mentioned in **verses 14-16**, being **“the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place”** and also being the **“fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma to from life to life.”** These are the things Paul was referring to when he said, **“And who is adequate for these things.”**

When we engage people in the name of Christ with the message of Christ like Paul did, he is telling us in **verses 14-16** that we, the ambassadors of Christ, like an aroma or fragrance, will invade their space and in doing so will invariably be used by God to strategically move them along to the seat that they will occupy in eternity, whether that seat is in heaven or in hell. In other words, we are God's appointed ushers in matters involving the eternal destiny of those that we choose to engage.

Now let us once again go back to Paul's question that he asked at the end of **verse 16**. And what was the question that Paul asked in light of this very important strategic role that had such far-reaching eternal consequences? Paul's question was **“And who is adequate for these things?”**

And what is the answer? The implied answer to Paul's question, “Who is adequate for these things?” is “I, the Apostle Paul, and those serving alongside of me are adequate for these things.” This is the implied answer.

I know that there are those who might say that the implied answer is “**No one is adequate for these things,**” but I don’t believe that they are correct. And why would I say this? I would say this based on the immediate context of **verse 17**, which is not about Paul’s inadequacy or the inadequacy of his companions, but is rather all about their adequacy for the things he just referred to in **verses 14-16**.

And if there is any doubt about this let me now read for you once again the question that Paul asked at the end of **verse 16**, along with the insertion of the implied answer that I have given to you, and then we will conclude with **verse 17**. And what I believe we will see is how well it all fits together.

So let us now do this and it would go something like this: “**And who is adequate for these things?** [I, the Apostle Paul, and those serving alongside of me are adequate for these things.” And now comes verse 17] **For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.**”

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 2:17, is not talking about his inadequacy or the inadequacy of his companions to do the things he mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, he is talking about their adequacy to do these very things. And he does this in two different ways: first negatively and then positively.

So how did Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:17** negatively affirm his adequacy for the things he had outlined in **2 Corinthians 2:14-16**? Paul, in 2 Corinthians 2:17, negatively affirmed his adequacy for the things he had outlined in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 by declaring that they, unlike many, were not peddling God’s Word. Or in other words, they unlike the “**many**” did not treat the ministry of God’s Word as a trade or as a business.

So where do we see that in **verse 17**? This thought is intrinsic in the word, “**peddle.**” So, what does this word mean? The word, “peddle,” (KAPELEUO) means to peddle for profit like a retailer.

In Paul’s day, to compare his opponents or “**the many**” to those who sold wares in the market was no compliment. Retailers in the ancient world were infamous for their dishonesty.

Such a comparison was thus a common way to cast doubt on someone's character and motives. So, what was the background that moved Paul to make such a statement and to imply what we inferred by this statement?

Let me ask you a question. Did Paul ever ask for money in return for his ministry among them? And what is answer? The answer is no! He had the right to do so but he had given up this right in order to not cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ. This is made very clear to us in **1 Corinthians 9:1-23**.

So, what about his opponents, the false teachers, who had come into Corinth? Could the same thing be said about them? Obviously, no! They, very much in contrast to the Apostle Paul, had obviously made money an issue. And why would they have done this? Paul is telling the Corinthians why they would have done this. It was because their underlying motivation for performing ministry was money. In other words, they were "peddlers" of God's Word.

So how did Paul initially affirm his adequacy for the things he outlined in **2 Corinthians 2:14-16**? Paul initially affirmed his adequacy for the things he had outlined in **2 Corinthians 2:14-16** negatively by declaring that they, unlike "many," were not peddling God's Word. But Paul was not done affirming his adequacy for the things he outlined in **2 Corinthians 2:14-16**.

After Paul, in 2 Corinthians 2:17, negatively affirmed his adequacy, he then concluded the verse by positively affirming his adequacy by declaring that he spoke sincerely as from God in Christ in the sight of God. Let me once again read for you **2 Corinthians 2:17** and see if this is not so. "**For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.**" So, what do these various phrases mean? When Paul speaks of his message as being "**from sincerity,**" he is saying that the manner and the methods he has been using to communicate with them has been determined entirely by God's grace in his life not by worldly cunning.

When Paul speaks of his message being "**from God,**" he is saying that his message is not from himself or from another; it is wholly and entirely from God Himself.



When Paul speaks of his message as being **“in Christ,”** he is saying that the message that he is giving is not only from God but is infused with the very life of Christ Himself.

And, finally, when Paul speaks of his message as being **“in the sight of God,”** he is saying that he understands very well that when he delivers the message God had given Him in the strength that Christ provides he had better do it carefully and with a sense of great personal humility since he knows that God is in the wings watching.

So what is the bottom line? The bottom line is this: Paul did not see himself and his companions as adequate because of who they were but rather because God had given Him a message, that he humbly in the sight of God through the strength and power that Christ was supplying was, in fact, proclaiming apart from any personal financial consideration.

Ministering in the name of Christ is not easy. It is filled with difficulties and at times it may seem overwhelming, but hopefully in those times we will not quit. But rather in those times we will choose to lift our eyes to God praise him for the opportunity to suffer these things as a captive of Christ as He leads us in His triumphal procession. And then having been filled with praise, let us commit ourselves to press forward in the very strategic ministry that has been given of being the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God and the fragrance of Christ among those who are perishing and among those who are being saved.

And we, in spite of all our weaknesses and shortcomings, know that we are, in fact, adequate for these things.

We are not inadequate for these things; we are very adequate for these things. Therefore, may God give us the grace, as the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God and the fragrance of Christ, to persevere in ministry knowing that we, in Christ, are wonderfully adequate for these things.