

2 Corinthians and The New Apostolic Reformation

The New Apostolic Reformation

C. Peter Wagner the church growth historian has identified a new movement in the church which he has called the "New Apostolic Reformation". He sees churches networked together and run by apostles in a new format that pursues holiness and mobilises the church for mission. This has made many people nervous (including me) as the danger of false and presumptive apostles seems not to be adequately covered. At the same time I see a need for the charismatic and Pentecostal movements to mature under strong leadership. I find the basis for this is the epistle of 2 Corinthians. It is interesting to note the increasing maturity and accountability as one moves from 1 Corinthians to 2 Corinthians. I believe the church in the immoral and pagan West today is a "Corinthian" church and while we are Spirit-filled and gifted we have a lot of maturing to do. We need to "move from 1 Corinthians to 2 Corinthians" and to do that we need the raising up of apostolic leadership. Some of the issues are canvassed below.

Body To Bride

1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians are connected epistles. 1 Corinthians is the "primer" where Paul laid down his prescriptions for the church in pagan Corinth. Now in 2 Corinthians he is coming to enforce those prescriptions and set the church the right way up. In 1 Corinthians the church is the body that had to function in a coordinated manner, now the body is becoming a bride - purified for the return of Christ. I see this as occurring in the church today. Over the last twenty years we have seen enormous emphasis on "body life" and gifts and being the body of Christ. We have heard many sermons from 1 Corinthians and become an organised and coordinated church. Now God is moving the body to become a bride - He is calling for purity. He will soon raise up apostles who will press for holiness in the body. There will also be false apostles trying to ensnare us thus 2 Corinthians is very relevant for where the Church is at today.

Internal Focus To External Focus

In 1 Corinthians Paul deals with issues such as morality, marriage, spiritual gifts, divisions, pride, the Lord's Supper, ethics, idols and love. All mainly internal church issues. In 2 Corinthians he moves on to consider the nature of true and false apostles, the basis for church discipline and the nature of relationships between the church and visiting apostles and the church and other churches - particularly those churches overseas (in Jerusalem) that were in financial need. The issues of 1 Corinthians are still there and immorality is still a concern but it is within the context of church discipline overall. Paul is trying to get the Corinthian church, now that much of the mess has been fixed up, to look outward to its responsibilities to other churches, to promises it has made and to discipline itself for holiness. He is striving to make it a grown up church - discerning, wise, and providing for the needs of others. He wants them to think of "regions beyond". Paul as a true apostle does not go into other people's areas but is constantly trying to go into "regions beyond". He has an external focus - he does not go to the nice churches to collect big offerings (as the false apostles do) but to places where there are no churches and supports himself with his own hands. I see this as saying a few things to today's church:

- We need to go beyond getting gifts to using gifts.
- That the focus of a mature church is beyond its four walls.
- That churches exist in relationship to other churches and in networks of believers.

- That we need to consider the needs of poverty stricken Christians overseas (2 Corinthians Chapters 8&9).
- That leaders should focus on ministering to "regions beyond" rather than just ministering to rich, attractive Western churches.
- That churches need to be discerning in how they build external relationships but still do it.

True and False Apostles

2 Corinthians deals a great deal with the distinction between true apostles such as Paul and the Satanic counterfeit "super-apostles" with their greedy deceptive boasting.

The word apostle is Greek for "sent one/messenger" and means the same as the Latin "missionary" from "missio - I send". Apostles are ones sent by God to lay the foundations of the church. As noted below there are four main types of apostles. Jesus who is the Chief Apostle (Hebrews 3:1) and who was sent from the Father. The Twelve who were called and sent by Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:2, Luke 6:13-16) and the Post-Ascension Apostles who were sent as Jesus's gifts to the church until it was fully matured (which has not yet happened) and who are part of the five-fold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers - for the equipping of the saints. These post-ascension apostles were a result of Jesus ascending into heaven (Eph 4:1-11) and therefore are NOT the Twelve who were selected before this time. They include Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Junia, James the Lord's brother, Apollos, Andronicus, Matthias and two "unnamed apostles".

Thus missionaries today who plant churches and establish new works of God and have authority over a number of churches may technically be considered "apostles". This however is such a confusing term to the majority of believers that it is probably best substituted with "church planter" "founder" or "overseer". Or similar appropriate term. Signs, wonders and miracles are seen as the "signs" of an apostle (2 Cor 12:12).

False "sent out ones" range from Mormons on bicycles to slick presenters of alternative gospels. True apostles are characterised by right doctrine, laying no other foundation other than Christ Jesus, the enduring of suffering, financial integrity, the testimony of Christ even in weakness - and signs, wonders and miracles done through their hands.

Notes on Apostles Today - possibly 4 main types of apostles:

1. Jesus - the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. (Sent by the Father)
2. The Twelve (Sent by Jesus Christ)
3. Post-Ascension Apostles - Ephesians 4:11 (Sent by the Holy Spirit)
 - (a) Founders: Paul, James the Lord's brother.
 - (b) Those that follow the founders: Titus, Barnabas
 - (c) Church based apostles: Andronicus and Junia, Priscilla & Aquila
4. False apostles

Names of apostles in Scripture (from "All The Apostles In The Bible" by Herbert Lockyer):

Those designated as being an "apostolos" are:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1)
2. Andrew, Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, James the son of Zebedee, John, Judas Iscariot, Matthew, Peter, Phillip, Simon the Canaanite/Zealot, Thaddeus,

Thomas (Matthew 3:2, Luke 6:13-16)

3. Andronicus (Romans 16:7), Apollos (1 Cor 4:6-9), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30) James the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19), Junias or Junia (Romans 16:7), Matthias (Acts 1:13-26), Paul (2 Cor 1:1), Silas & Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1, 2:6 2 Thess 1:1), Two Unnamed Apostles (2 Cor 8:18-23)

Themes From 2 Corinthians

The following are some themes from 2 Corinthians that I believe are tremendously relevant to the state of the church today as the New Apostolic Reformation unfolds. The paragraphs are brief to keep this chapter short so please look up the Scripture references as you do so for an even deeper understanding.

1. **True apostles and suffering. Treasure in earthen vessels. Strength in weakness.** (2 Corinthians 1:3-11, 4:7-11, 16-18, 11: 16-33, 12:7-10) Power - (2 Corinthians 4:7, 6:7, 12:9, 13:4)

True apostles do the "hard yards" for Jesus and are prepared to go to poor places and unknown regions to preach the gospel to regions beyond. They feel their frailty acutely are "exhibited last of all" (1 Cor 4:9) and have their treasures in earthen vessels so that the glory may be not from man but from God.

Power is perfected not in riches, glamour or high status but "in weakness". In fact on all four of the occasions when the word power is used in 2 Corinthians it is used in association with the idea of power in weakness. The true apostle has no confidence in themselves or their human abilities but great confidence in God.

2. **False apostles and greed. Deception. Boastfulness. Externals as credentials. Competent "in themselves". Appearances. "Performers".** (2 Corinthians 2:17, 11:13-21, 10:7-18, 4:2, 12:11-13)

The false apostles come along to existing works of God and preach new things - a different Christ, a different gospel and a different Holy Spirit (11:13-21). They distort the truth in cunning and deceptive ways and use secret and shameful strategies (4:2). They do so mainly for financial gain "peddling the word of God for profit" (2:17). They create churches that love the externals of good oratory and polished performance and which sneered on the "unimpressive" Paul as a result. (10:10-11). They are a financial burden on the church - which Paul was not.

3. **The Corinthians past history as a church with a blotched copybook** (2 Cor. 12:21, 1 Cor. Chap. 5,6,10,11, 15)

Corinth was a new church plant in a pagan and debauched city and the lifestyle of its members was only slowly changing into a Christlikeness that few understood. In 1 Corinthians Paul chastised the church for disunity, factions, spiritual pride, tolerating incest, having sex with prostitutes, getting drunk at communion, being disorderly during worship and major doctrinal errors such as believing that there was no resurrection from the dead. It was a church with a very blotched copybook that Paul was trying to turn into the very bride of Christ. (2 Cor 11:2)

4. **A church rebuked.** (2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11, 10:1-6, 11:1-6, 12:20-13:10)

Paul gives them the understanding about what is wrong in 1 Corinthians and comes in 2 Corinthians to set things right one and for all. Here Paul is enforcing what he has told them. His words are strong and forceful "I will spare no-one" etc. 2 Corinthians is an ultimatum to consider holiness and get in line with God's standards. I believe God is at the point of giving the church in the West just such an ultimatum - he is coming soon and will not spare those who have been immoral or divisive.

5. **Paul's love and confidence in the Corinthians despite their blotched copybook.** (2 Corinthians 2:3-4, 7:4, 7:14-16, 8:22-24, 9:2-4, 11:11, 12:15)

Paul does not just threaten however. He also repeats his great love and total confidence in them. He opens wide his heart to them that they may appropriate Christ and asks that they may also open wide their hearts to Paul.

6. **Holiness and church discipline. The call to a fully Christ-like life.**

(2 Corinthians 2:14-16, 3:16-18, 5:9-10, 5:16-6:2, 6:14-7:1, 12:20-13:10)
Paul calls the church to be separate from the surrounding Corinthian culture which

was so debauched that "to play the Corinthian" meant 'to commit sexual immorality'. Up on the hill in Corinth was the temple of Aphrodite with its 1000 prostitutes for pagan sexual rites. Corinth was a port city where sailors took their recreation. Many of the congregation had lived this lifestyle before becoming Christians. Paul calls them to separate themselves to Christ and be holy and "counter-cultural". To "come out from among them" and then God would bless them and call them sons and daughters of the most high. Every call to separation from the world in the Bible is also a call to more intimate fellowship with the Father.

7. The place of spiritual authority - building up not tearing down. Apostolic validation. (2 Corinthians 1:23-24, 10:8, 12:12, 13:10)

Paul said his authority was "for building you up, not tearing you down". In the past church discipline has often been severe and destructive and so it is seldom practised today. People were disfellowshipped for trivial reasons such as talking to the wrong person or wearing cosmetics. It often became an exercise of power by a dominating and manipulative pastor or elder. However the proper use of church discipline is to get people to become like Jesus Christ. Just as a football team may discipline an errant athlete with the aim of bringing them on track so that they eventually become winners so the church should discipline people for holiness. Also if we are disciplined by others now it saves us from being disciplined by God later. **(1 Corinthians 11:31-32 NASB) But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. {32} But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.**

8. The Church as the Betrothed. (2 Corinthians 11:1-3)

Paul says that he has promised them to Christ as a "pure virgin" in other words as a perfected and undefiled church. The Church is the bride of Christ that Jesus died to redeem just as Hosea bought back Gomer from a life of degradation. The possibility of the Corinthians being pure seems remote by human calculation but the blood of Christ is powerful enough to accomplish even this and so Paul made it his aim in ministry. Apostles are interested in the ongoing quality of the church - not just its mere establishment or the numbers baptised.

9. Apostles moving into "Regions Beyond". (2 Corinthians 10:13-18)

Paul says that his great desire is to preach the gospel in "regions beyond you" (2 Cor 10:16). The apostolic vision is for an international church that reaches Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. As the church moves into maturity it will be concerned with much more than just the four walls of the local church or the surrounding parish boundaries. It will find ways of reaching out to "regions beyond". As noted before 2 Corinthians has an external focus. The apostolic move will see the church planted in difficult areas where it has never been planted before. As someone has said "There is no such thing as a closed country, you can go into any country as long as you are prepared to not come out". Paul was prepared to take the gospel anywhere - no matter what the cost.

10. Networked churches - churches together (2 Corinthians 1:12-17, chaps 8&9)

In 2 Corinthians Christian networks are very much in evidence. The Macedonians (just north of the Corinthians and the "hillbillies" compared to the sophisticated city dwellers of Corinth) are often extolled for their generosity and for the support of Paul's ministry. To be sure there is a bit of playing on the rivalry between the regions in order to get them to follow Jesus more fully but it is hardly subtle and

both the Corinthian and Macedonian Christians seem to buy into it with gusto. Then there is the collection for the poverty stricken church in Jerusalem. There is further evidence of networking in Paul's search for Titus, the composition of the team that handled the collection and the planning behind Paul's visit to Corinth. It is evident that the Corinthian church a) received ministry from other churches and visiting apostles b) gave financially to other churches and some of the visiting apostles c) was involved in famine relief. It was connected into a network which was vital for its church discipline, ministry and Christian activity. The insulated and self-contained modern local church is thus very possibly contrary to the pattern of the New Testament church.

11. Giving to Christian aid organisations which demonstrate financial integrity.

(2 Corinthians chap. 8 & 9)

The church in Jerusalem was experiencing persecution from both the Jews and the Romans and also the famine predicted by Agabus. Their possessions has been seized and that had been imprisoned and exposed to public insult and persecution - and apparently endured it joyfully at least at first (Hebrews 10:32-34) "knowing that you yourselves has a better and more lasting possession". They were now in need of aid from other churches and Paul was collecting an offering from the Gentiles to relieve their poverty and also to help build unity between he Jewish and Gentile Christians. People of high and well known integrity were selected to handle the offering. (2 Cor 8;16-21) There was demonstrated accountability and integrity in this first Christian aid organisation. **"(2 Corinthians 8:20 NASB) taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift;"**.

Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians are often used to preach weekly generous giving to the local church. In fact that are the opposite - they are exhorting weekly generous giving from the local church to Christians in distress overseas. The cash flow is outward not inward! The motive is not that the programs of the local church may run but that "there may be equality" between churches in the body of Christ. **(2 Corinthians 8:13-15 NASB) For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality-- {14} at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; {15} as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."**

As networks develop among churches blessing will flow to those churches that bless their poorer brethren financially. Support of new works in rural areas is one form that this is still practised today. However we still need to go one step further and provide financial relief, with integrity, to deserving churches in nations afflicted by drought, famine and poverty. God wants financial equality between brothers and sister churches in the body of Christ.

12. Spiritual warfare and Satan's schemes to destroy the church through deception, false teaching, immorality, persecution, division and accusation. (2 Corinthians 1:8-11, 2:5-11, 4:4, 10:3-5, 11:3-6, 11:13-21)

Satan is an ever-present foe in 2 Corinthians. From the opening chapters where Paul is fighting wild beasts at Ephesus and despairing of life itself through to chapter 11 on false apostles, divisive emissaries of Satan masquerading as servants of righteousness. Satan is called the "prince of this world", shown as the one that blinds

those that are perishing to the truths of the gospel and the originator of ideas and pretensions that are set up against the knowledge of God. Paul seems to have had some first-hand experience of Satan because he says that he "masquerades as an angel of light" - perhaps Paul or someone close to him found this out through an encounter with an "angel" that went horribly wrong. Satan's plan for the average Christian is outlined in 2:5-11 - tempt them into sin, then expose them to judgement, have them overwhelmed by the outcome, ensure that they are not forgiven or restored but treated legalistically then drive them far from God. To ensure this plan fails Paul says for the church to restore the person subjected to church discipline as soon as they have repented "lest Satan outwit us -for we are not unaware of his schemes". (2 Corinthians 2:11) The apostolic is opposed at every turn by the Satanic. He will attempt to destroy those that emerge as apostles and to discredit the ministry by the scheme shown above - or as in Paul's case by portraying the apostle as dowdy, unimpressive and not a top notch performer on stage so that people turn to the more glamorous false apostles. These false apostles will perform false miracles and nine clear warnings are given in Scripture about them and their attempt to deceive the elect. (e.g 2Thess 2:5-11, Matt 24:24, Mark 13:22)

13. **True and false revelation. The danger of pride.** (2 Corinthians 11:1-6, 12:1-10, 10:1,2)

Paul received such an abundance of revelations that God gave him an affliction a "thorn in the flesh" - possibly a persecutor such as Alexander the coppersmith, so that he had to be content with insults and persecutions and to find that "My grace is sufficient for you" (12:1-10). Thus, in the apostolic, even true revelation can be intoxicating and spiritually dangerous if not accompanied by humility. False revelation such as that outlined in chapter 11 - where Paul speaks of another gospel, another Christ and another Holy Spirit is even worse. It leads people into captivity to false apostles who are servants of Satan. Thus a mature apostolic church needs first of all to be a discerning church believing only true revelation from God and able to tell true from false. In Hebrews maturity and deep revelation is imparted to those who have learned to tell good from evil. (**Hebrews 5:14 NASB**) **But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.** Secondly the apostolic church needs to humble in the way it handles the truth and not puffed up with pride. Thus we need to have faith without gullibility and vision without deception. For this to happen we need to develop a) a deep knowledge of the Word especially in the elders and leaders of the church. b) a solid character that is humble and practised in discerning good from evil. c) the ability to wait on a revelation to see whether it is from God and to test it - so that we are not blown about by every wind of doctrine and every new fad. d) an intimacy with god so that we know the Presence of the Truth and can thus be sensitive to the intrusion of evil. e) the development of the anointing of the Holy Spirit so that we may be led by Him into "all truth" (John 14;26, 1 John 2:20,27, 1 Cor 2:9-16)

14. **The desired future of the church -unity and purity - a discerning, disciplined and dynamic witness to the glory of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus.** (2 Corinthians 2:12-5:21)

All this time, throughout the epistle, Paul is nudging the Corinthians towards Christ-likeness, towards being the pure Bride of Christ. In the early chapters of 2 Corinthians Paul frequently refers to the glory of the New Covenant and to the vast privilege of being ambassadors for Christ with a message of reconciliation. The church, when right with God, is a dynamic witness to the glory of God in the face of Christ and is being transformed from glory to glory by the Lord who is the Spirit. (2

Cor 3) Thus the church is to both reflect God's glory and to be constantly transformed into it through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Glorification involves purification as one component and purification involves a separation from the world and from false doctrine and thus requires discernment and maturity. It is also impossible to have a glorious church if it is divided or disrupted so that unity and discipline under apostolic authority are key aspects of a church reflecting the glory of God. Thus as the church moves from body to bride and from immaturity to maturity it will become a united, pure, discerning and dynamic witness to the glory of the New Covenant under the discipline of true apostolic leadership.