

Well DISCOVER is almost upon us. After more than 18 months of planning and preparation it begins this week. I hope we are all going to make the most of it. I hope we are going to turn up at the events and, if we can, invite our contact people.

As we have been preparing for the mission in these last weeks we have been thinking about the different models for mission which we see in the New Testament and now for the final one we turn to the Apostle Paul. In this passage in 2 Cor 5 we can see something of the way Paul went about sharing the gospel.

1. Paul's method v11-13

When we were doing lost for words as a course at the end of last year and then doing a synopsis of it in the sermons earlier in the year, I was encouraging us to learn a way of sharing the gospel message. You may remember the hand illustration – God, man, God, what if I do, what if I don't. Along with that I encouraged us to work out our own story of what God has done in our lives. I did this because we never know when we will have the opportunity to say something. Someone told me just on Monday that in the hairdressers he had been asked "so what made you become a Christian?" He was glad he had something to say clear in his mind.

I'm not sure Paul had such aids or techniques but he states clearly here what he was about, v11 "we try to persuade men". In Acts 18 we read how Paul stayed in Corinth for some time and while he was there "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). He talked with people, answered questions, shared the reasons why he was a Christian and so on.

Paul and Timothy with him as writers of this letter worked hard to try and explain the faith to people and so help them become followers of Jesus. They did this in Corinth and in every other place they visited.

Over these next days working in partnership with the team from Oak Hill we have the same opportunity and I hope we will grasp it with both hands.

But of course it doesn't end there. Your contact people may not come to the events over the course of the week ahead. It may not be the right time for them. However we still need to be ready as Paul said in Col 4:6, "so that you may know how to answer everyone" and as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." In other words we need to be following Paul's example here of seeking to persuade people. There is good clear logical reason for our faith in Jesus Christ. I hope you believe that.

Just after the mission has ended we are going to have a question and answer session with the idea of trying to help your contact person to understand more of the reasons for our hope in Jesus. Then

starting in May I will be running a Christianity Explained course where we look at topics like who is Jesus, why did he die, what is a Christian what is faith. I make no bones about it the aim of the course is to persuade men and women to turn to Jesus, not by force or pressure but by asking people to look for themselves at the evidence from Scripture and see that Jesus is God who died for us and through whom we can be restored to God. If you know someone for whom that might be a help then please invite them along.

In all of this we follow Paul's example of seeking to persuade people to follow Jesus.

2. Paul's motives v11-14

If Paul's aim was to persuade people to turn to God we know that he didn't always find it easy. Just a look across the page 2 Cor 6:4-5....

It is not easy. Someone mentioned to me the other day they had invited 23 people to one event and no one was either able or willing to come. Certainly for the Progressive supper we've invited 2 couples and neither can come. The temptation is to give up, to think well I've tried them and they said no so I'll give up and I won't even go to the event.

Can I humbly suggest that both those attitudes are wrong. Even if we can't bring someone to the various events I would suggest that we come along anyway and share in the events and through it encourage those putting the events on and those who have brought people with them.

But more we don't stop inviting people. It may well be that some people just are not our person of peace. They are just not in that place at the moment where the Christian faith resonates with them. But we carry on going. Hopefully we will not experience the trials Paul had but equally I hope we can learn from the things that motivated him to keep going when things were tough.

So what kept Paul going? Just have a look at these verses and see if you can spot it. If you are listening to this as a download then you also look at vs 11-14 of 2 Cor 5 and see if you can see what motivated Paul.

Can I suggest two things which seem on the face of it contradictory:

a. v11 the fear of the Lord and b. v14 Christ's love

a. the fear of the Lord v11

If we look back to v10 we see that Paul was convinced that one day we must all appear before the judgement seat of God. Now we looked at this in a sermon in December last year. Then we recognised that Paul here is not speaking of judgement here in terms being declared guilty or not because as he says in Romans 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus". It is not about condemnation but about evaluation. It is not about whether we are saved or not because we cannot lose our salvation.

Paul knew that eventually he would come before God and his ministry would be judged. He warned the Corinthian church of this in the first letter, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work." (1 Cor 3:11-13).

With that in mind Paul was motivated to persuade men so that at the end he would know he had fulfilled the task God had called him to and would receive God's commendation "well done good and faithful servant".

The second thing Paul said in terms of his motivation was that

b. The love of Christ compels us v 14

that is because Jesus loved the world so much that he gave his life for all people, yes even someone like Paul, Paul was motivated to help people understand that. At the back of all this was that day on the road to Damascus when he met with Jesus and was turned around. Christ's love for him motivated him to share the gospel with others. It didn't just motivate him it compelled him. It drove him on.

It is this which helps us look at our own motives in terms of Discover. If you invite someone to come to something say the Progressive Dinner or the service next Sunday why are you doing that? Are you doing it so that people see you have invited someone or you can tell others you have invited someone? Are you doing it to try and boost numbers at church? Are you doing it because I am encouraging you to do it? Paul would say no to all these. Instead he would say do it because Jesus loves that person and because he wants them to know how much he loves them and one clear way for them to know that is to hear the gospel message of his love which Nick Tucker will explain next Sunday. It is that which should motivate us as it motivated Paul. Paul says v14 "the love of Christ compels us" it was the love which drove him on.

It was that and nothing else. We see that if we carry on reading for there we see that Paul was v14b-15, "convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" In that we see a bit more of his motives. There was nothing of self in this. As he says in v12 not trying to commend himself rather seeking to serve others with the gospel so that the Christians in Corinth would as he puts it "have pride" in him that is see he was a true apostle. It was the love of Christ rather than any selfish ideas that motivated Paul to sacrifice much and suffer much to serve people with the gospel.

Last Sunday evening I was taking a service in another church and we closed the service by singing 'And can it be'. It has that great line in the penultimate verse "my chains fell off my heart was free". There weren't many of us but we sang it with gusto. After the service two friends there mentioned it and I said yes that was how it was for me. Through the love of Christ I was set free from the punishment and burden of sin. That's what God has done for me and that's what I long for others to know.

Friends this is what DISCOVER is about and I hope we can all buy into that and because of it support the mission. Support it in prayer, support it in inviting your contact people and even if they say no support it by coming along to the events yourself.

This was Paul's great motivation born of his own experience, it is the motivation what Christ in his love has done for us. It compels us to share it with others, we just can't keep in the amazing grace that God has shown us

3. Paul's message v18-21

So what was it that Paul said to people to persuade them to turn to God?

Well the answer is there in v20 "Be reconciled to God". Paul saw himself as "Christ's ambassador" the one who represented Christ and spoke with the authority of Christ to bring the message "be reconciled". In this instance to the Christians in Corinth the challenge was to be in reality what they claimed to be. But when he had first arrived in Corinth it had been to be restored as God's children through the death of Jesus on the cross. We see this if we go back to v18-19. God's has in Jesus through the cross reconciled the world to himself and he has given to Paul the ministry and message of reconciliation.

I know people in this congregation who have friends who are German! Now that is not a controversial statement is it – well I hope it isn't. However 70 years ago it might have given that we were then at war with Germany. However things have moved on peace was declared, we are now united to Germany through the European Union and the war is history.

That essentially is reconciliation. Through our sin and rebellion against the will of God we humans were separated from God. We were his enemies but through Jesus' death on the cross peace has been declared and now we are united to God through Christ Jesus and our sin is history, "when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son". (Romans 5:10)

That was Paul's message and that is the message we wish to share with others, the message of Christ's love".

This was the ministry Paul had been called by Jesus to perform. Paul was the ambassador of Jesus, standing in his place with his message. Now that was for Paul a unique ministry and Paul as an ambassador did speak with a special authority.

However the gospel message of reconciliation has been passed on to the church and we too, under the authority of the apostles through the word of God, have from God a ministry and message of reconciliation. God's call to us as to Paul is to proclaim that in and through Jesus all people can be reconciled to God. All who through their rebellion against God are his enemies can be made his friends. All can v21 become righteous in God's sight with the record of our sin expunged because Christ who was sinless took our sin on himself.

Many of us would tell our friends where a bargain can be found, or about a great film we have seen, We will appear that is we will be made "manifest" our lives will be opened up as we stand before Jesus, or recommend a good book we have read why would we not want to tell them about this amazing grace of God?

Here is a great model of mission for us to look to. We see Paul willing to engage with people and seek to persuade them to turn to God. We see that he was motivated by a Godly fear in which he knew his life and ministry would ultimately be revealed before God and the compulsion of the love of Christ for all humanity. In the light of this he faithfully proclaimed the message of reconciliation that people might be turned from sin and wrath to faith and peace. It is a model to note and a model to follow.