

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: May 23: 2 Corinthians 10: 1-11

As discussed earlier, this does look like part of another letter: picking up again a debate that we thought had been resolved. On the other hand, perhaps we have all written letters which don't flow easily and evenly. I've even heard sermons that go back on themselves! Basically, Paul has been accused of writing tough letters and preaching wishy washy sermons; and, which seems very unfair whether true or not true, of not matching his powerful letters with his unimpressive physical appearance. (One early account suggests that he was a short man with a bald head, bandy legs, and joined up eye brows. Not someone to win the beau of the year award!)

This is an opportunity to think what we expect from a minister or as preacher – with good looks probably not being top of the list. (Bosworth commented on the great anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce, who was a very small and unimpressive man, that he saw a shrimp go up to speak, and gradually turn into a whale.)

You may want to read more than one version of this text, because the different choices of words do give rather different impressions. For example, "I'm quite sure of my standing with Christ" might sound incredibly big-headed; although what Paul is saying is that in a place and time absolutely cluttered with grandiose ideas, Paul was devoted to Christ crucified as the ultimate truth which displaced all the competing philosophies and theories – including Emperor worship.

The Church has always been cursed by individuals and sects determined that they have the right kind of Christianity, and everybody else has got it wrong. In the Mission Field, it has confused converts from other beliefs to Christianity, to be told that the Christian message they received was about the wrong kind of Christianity. Pauli uses powerfully military terminology about his mission to destroy falsehood; and he could be quoted by those determined to dismiss out of hand all non-Christian faiths and all versions of Christianity other than the "true" Church (the five people in Little Framlingham who have really seen the light!). But God was revealing Himself before Christianity as we know it, and reveals Himself to conscientious humble seekers outside Christianity as we know it. I go back to CS Lewis, and not least the Narnia stories. Might it not be that some who have been put off by their church encounter, but are going on looking, are closer to Jesus than some who have built themselves a very small "real Christianity" dug-out and have given up looking?

Paul uses some interesting good thing words: including Meekness, Humility, Reasonableness, and Building Up (rather than breaking down).

The link with Chapter 9 is that, while it is always good to learn more about our faith, Jesus is more interested in how many ways we have discovered to express our Christian love than in how many Greek words we know for love.