

They Will Know We Are Christians by our Scars: The Preacher's Body in Pauline Missiology

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Introduction

In his 1877 Yale Lectures, Episcopal minister Phillips Brooks described preaching as “the bringing of truth through personality” (1899, 5). These words have become something of a dictum in homiletics ever since (see Johnson 2009, 173). According to Brooks, “The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his [sic] lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him” (1899, 9). He could have added that the truth must also come through the person’s body; not character, affections, intellectual and moral being alone, but the preacher’s physical self as well. After all, the body is the means through which human beings experience the world (see Merleau-Ponty 2012).

The act of preaching cannot be separated from the body of the preacher. Whenever a person preaches, it’s their body that speaks. Lips, yes. Along with the entire physique. Her whole body communicates. Verbal proclamation is, therefore, inseparable from the preacher’s physicality. While a sermon may be a literary artifact, preaching is an embodied act: the preacher’s body serving as the medium for the gospel message (though this does not reduce preaching to a speech-act; see Rottman 2008).

Recognizing this reality, many homiletics texts make some reference to the preacher’s body. Yet, in most of these instances, the concern is limited to the preacher’s attire or their body language—matters related to posture, gesture, voice.¹ While the role of the body in preaching has garnered more interest in the last two decades, these

¹ Broadus devotes four chapters to matters pertaining to delivery (1870/1979:263–307), including one focused exclusively on the body (290–299). While he covers facial expressions, posture, and gesture, he does not say a word about other corporeal matters. Two other more recent examples will suffice. Robinson gives an entire chapter to this in *Biblical Preaching* (2001:202–220). Subsections in this chapter have the following headings: “Grooming and Dress,” “Movement and Gestures,” “Eye Contact,” “Vocal Delivery,” “Rehearsal,” and “Feedback.” Chapell (1994) leaves this material for an appendix titled “Delivery, Dress, and Style.” One noteworthy example that moves beyond these basic matters of delivery is McCullough (2018).

welcome developments (largely in the sphere of preaching-as-performance; see Childers 1998; Farley 2008) have yet to investigate the place of the preacher's physical scars suffered as a result of bearing faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, this gap is unsurprising given the authorial contexts from which these homiletics works emerge (read: privileged). On the other hand, the absence is odd given the significance of the body in the New Testament, generally, and in the Pauline corpus, specifically. To wit: Christians worship the Word made flesh (John 1:14; Rom 1:3; 8:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:7; Col 1:22; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:13; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7), and central to the faith are three embodied events: Jesus' incarnation (from embryo to birth), His crucifixion, and His resurrection.

The Apostle Paul also makes frequent mention of his own body, describing everything from his circumcision (Rom 2:28–29; 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 2:15; Phil 4:3–5) to his manual labor (Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 2:1–5; 4:12; 9:3–18; 16:21; 2 Cor 10:10–11; 11:6; Gal 6:11; 1 Thess 2:9; 4:11; Phlm 19). Multiple times he refers to his body and the impact it has on his preaching (Gal 4:12–20; 2 Cor 12:7). He also catalogs the various (physical) hardships he endures on account of his ministry, chiefly in his Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 4:9–13; 2 Cor 4:8–10; 6:3–10; 11:23–33; 12:10; cf. Rom 8:35; Phil 1:12–26; 2:17; 4:12) (see Fitzgerald 1984).

Among the items Paul lists in the *Peristasenkatalog* are incidents of physical violence he has had to endure; violence that has left permanent marks (cf. Gal 6:17; Acts 14:19; 16:19–24). What's the significance of these physical scars for his gospel proclamation? What function did his reference to them serve in his letters? What relationship exists for Paul, if any, between his bodily sufferings as an apostle and those of Christians in general?

In seeking answers to these important questions, this essay will briefly examine four of the hardship catalogs in Paul's Corinthian correspondence, along with a fifth relevant text, before suggesting contemporary consequences arising out of the exegetical conclusions.

1 Corinthians 4:9–13

⁹ For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to humans. ¹⁰ We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are sensible people in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored, but we are dishonored. ¹¹ To the present hour we are hungry and

thirsty, we are naked and beaten and homeless,¹² and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;¹³ when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. (NRSVue)²

Paul's first³ letter to the Corinthian church—a church he planted (3:6)—is written to bring unity and order to a fractured community. Throughout the letter, he is careful to set every aspect of the church's identity and behavior in light of the cross and the crucified Christ.

Following an epistolary introduction (1:1–10), the apostle moves immediately to discussing dissensions between the Corinthian believers, including rival preacher-centered factions (1:10–4:21). After articulating his own homiletic (2:1–3:4), he corrects false ideas about the role of preachers (3:5–17) and reproaches the church for misunderstanding the wisdom of the world with that of God (3:18–23). In light of the preceding material, Paul instructs the church on how preachers like him and Apollos ought to be regarded (4:1–21).

This last section is of special interest for our study. In particular, Paul writes of being “beaten” as a result of his missionary activity. While *kolaphizō* may be metaphoric here (as it likely is in 2 Cor 12:7), there's no textual reason for understanding it other than literally: Paul experienced physical assault in the course of his ministry.

His purpose in detailing this and other hardships he has had to endure is not to shame the Corinthians but to “admonish” (*nouthetōn*) them as a father would a child (4:15). In light of this spiritual relationship, Paul urges the church to “imitate” (*mimētēs*) him. While he sends Timothy to them to give a fuller explication of what this imitation consists of (4:17), surely it includes following the example of enduring suffering for the sake of gospel proclamation (cf. Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6–7; 2:14). As Joseph Fitzmyer notes, “He wants his ‘children’ to . . . follow his way of living out the gospel, which is a humble way of life with much suffering” (2008, 223; cf. 1 Thess 1:6–7; 2:14; Phil 3:17).

Such conduct is consistent with the way in which Paul initially proclaimed the *mystērion* of God to the Corinthians: not with eloquent rhetoric as the Sophists familiar to them spoke but in (physical, bodily) weakness (2:1–4; cf. 2 Cor 10:10). If his own

² All Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition.

³ Canonically, speaking; cf. 1 Cor 5:9. Some identify this lost letter with 1 Cor 6:14–7:1.

testimony is to be believed, Paul was not a professional orator and, in fact, shunned the prevailing techniques and methods of persuasive speech, relying instead on the power of God (2:5). For him, the one who preaches “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2) is not only someone who eschews the speech patterns of the world but whose very body testifies via its weakness, to the crucified one.

This is simply logical for Paul whose entire life and ministry is one of calling others to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1; cf. Gal 4:12–20) (see Ellington 2004). If Christ suffered bodily and died in proclaiming good news, it follows naturally that those who preach him will experience something of what he endured.

2 Corinthians 4:8–10

⁸ We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, ⁹ persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, ¹⁰ always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

Paul’s second canonical letter to the Corinthians is written for their edification (12:19).⁴ Throughout the letter, Paul makes so many references to his afflictions that even a cursory reading of the epistle reveals how pivotal the theme of apostolic suffering is to his argument. He writes in anticipation of a future return to Corinth (13:1), though he has had to change his immediate plans.

After some introductory words of greeting, doxology, and thanksgiving (1:1–11),⁵ he explains why a planned visit has been postponed (1:12–2:13), before delving into a lengthy digression and description of his apostolic ministry (2:14–7:4). After setting his work in the context of the new covenant (2:17–3:18), he moves to an extended reflection on the place of suffering in his ministry (4:7–5:10).

Within this section, Paul gives the first of his four *peristasis* catalogs in the letter. He likens believers’ physical bodies to jars of clay (4:7; see Oropeza 2018, 421–423), then lists a variety of trials he has had to endure for the sake of proclaiming Christ—afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down—each trial balanced by a divine antithesis (4:8–9).

⁴ Lots of ink has been spilled debating the unity of the epistle. Regardless of whether the Apostle Paul wrote the entirety of it as it currently stands or later redactors stitched together two or more letters into its current canonical form, the overall argument of this paper is not largely affected; see Long (2004).

⁵ As early as his introduction, Paul makes clear that suffering is going to be a prominent theme in the letter, as he gives thanks to God for comfort amid his afflictions.

Especially pertinent is that rather than discrediting his apostleship, Paul presents these sufferings in order to prove his apostolic legitimacy.

With respect to the body, these afflictions surely include bodily harm suffered in service of his ministry. For instance, *kataballomenoi*, the fourth of the trials, “was a technical term in wrestling (‘thrown down’), in boxing (‘knock down’), and in battle (‘strike down’)” (Harris 2005, 344). In other words, the persecution Paul encountered most certainly involved physical violence.

The totality of his sufferings was not limited to a particular space and time but in some sense, *pantote* (cf. *dei* at 4:11). Paul and his colleagues are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies” (4:10). Murray Harris helpfully summarizes: “First, the resurrection life of Jesus is evident at precisely the same time as there is a ‘carrying around’ of his dying. Indeed, the very purpose of the believer’s identification with Jesus in his sufferings is to provide an opportunity for the display of Jesus’ risen life. Second, one and the same physical body is the place where the sufferings of Jesus are repeated and where His risen power is manifested” (2005, 347).

2 Corinthians 6:3–10

³ We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷ truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and yet are true, ⁹ as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, ¹⁰ as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing everything.

Paul continues describing his role in 2 Cor 5:11–7:4. After articulating a vision of ministry based not on appearances but rooted in the love of Christ (5:11–15), he summarizes the gospel story, highlighting the implications for reconciliation with God (5:16–21). From there, he proceeds to make a defense of his ministry, addressing those who question his qualifications (6:1–10; cf. 1:15–19; 4:4). Here, we find the second

peristasis catalog in the letter, as Paul juxtaposes the trials he has endured with the virtues evident in his life to demonstrate that he is a genuine follower of Jesus.

Paul is at pains to ensure “that no fault may be found with [his] ministry” (6:1). He has sought to live in such a way that would be a credit to the God he serves (6:2), and to prove his legitimacy, he marshals his physical sufferings as evidence. The reason he has endured “hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger” (6:4–5) is because he has staked his entire life on the resurrection of Jesus. It is for this reason that he can say, “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). He has endured affliction as a servant of the crucified and risen Jesus, and what scars he has suffered are but a “slight momentary affliction” (2 Cor 4:17).

What is more, his service has been for the sake of those whom he believes need to be reconciled to God. “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord,” he writes, “we try to persuade others” (5:11). Paul sees himself and his missionary colleagues as “ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through [them]” (5:20). In other words, his bodily suffering has served a missional purpose and continues to do so.⁶

2 Corinthians 11:23–33

²³ Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. ²⁸ And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. ³² In Damascus, the

⁶ Harris (2005) lays out three possible groups to whom Paul is making his appeal: a) unbelievers; b) Corinthians believers; and c) any evangelistic audience (447–449). While he prefers option c, regardless of which group is in view, what is clear is that Paul experiences suffering because of his missionary endeavors.

governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me,³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.

The tone of 2 Corinthians changes in chapter 10, which has led some to theorize that the last four chapters of the epistle were originally part of one or more no-longer-extant letters (see Thrall 1994, 3–49). The joy and affection that marked the first nine chapters seems to have abruptly given way to bitterness,⁷ as Paul spends a significant portion of chapters 10 through 13 detailing the suffering life as normative for followers of Jesus—in contrast to the life of exaltation and glory taught and modeled by the so-called super-apostles (11:1–15).

He points to himself and his sufferings as an example of what faithful witness to Jesus looks like in 11:23–33, the third of the letter’s *peristasis* catalogs. This is his “boasting” and the evidence of his Lord’s commendation of him (10:17–18; cf. his opponents’ boasting in 10:12–13). Christ’s power is made perfect in weakness (12:1–10), as the story of the crucified Christ is lived out in the sufferings of His followers.

In his catalog of hardships, Paul lists imprisonments, floggings, being lashed and beaten with rods and stoned and shipwrecked, living in constant danger from a variety of threats, in addition to dealing with hunger, exposure, and psychological pressure because of his concern for the welfare of the churches (11:23–33). Paul offers this list as proof that he is a “better” servant of Christ than those who oppose him. He details his sufferings to convince those who may have been led astray, whose affections for Christ have waned (11:3; cf. 6:11–13).

Harris notes the seeming strangeness of this strategy: “What must have surprised the Corinthians was that Paul seeks to establish his superiority in Christ’s service by tabulating his adversities rather than by appealing to his success in founding congregations in strategically important centers around the Aegean, or by referring to the number of converts won, or by citing miracles performed. Rather, appeal is made to evidence of his shame and dishonor” (Harris 2005, 798). On the surface, this is an unexpected strategy, yet it is entirely consistent with the apostle’s approach in his letters to remind his recipients of the cruciform life.

⁷ Hence the view of some that these latter chapters represent a portion of the pain letter Paul alludes to in

2 Cor 2:4.

That Paul lists things the Corinthians disdained suggests that he was not trying to gain goodwill from his hearers (contra Peterson 1998, 118). What his catalog of sufferings does is further forge his identification with Christ “who was crucified in weakness” (13:4). Jennifer Glancy (2004) imagines Paul showing the Corinthians his scars, reminding them that Christ had suffered likewise.⁸ And, as convincingly argued by Kar Yong Lim, Paul’s scars not only “tell the story of his weakness; but, more importantly, they tell the story of Jesus” (2009, 179). It is not Paul’s words alone that herald good news; the gospel is literally written on his flesh, embodied in his mutilations (cf. Gal 6:17).

2 Corinthians 2:14–17

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: ¹⁶ to the one group a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is qualified for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not peddlers of God’s word like so many, but as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God, we are speaking in Christ before God.

While not a catalog of his hardships, a fifth passage from Paul’s Corinthian correspondence is worth considering before attempting to summarize the role of bodily suffering in his apostolic ministry. As Paul begins describing this ministry in 2 Corinthians, he employs two metaphors. The first is the triumphal procession (2:14), a likely an allusion to a familiar event for his Hellenistic audience, whereby a conquering general returned home, victorious in war, leading his captives behind him. What is more difficult to discern is how Paul sees himself fitting into this image (along with how his readers would have understood it). Is he among the triumphant or the captive? While various suggestions have been proposed (see Schnabel 2008, 137–139), Scott Hafemann’s (1986) influential work concludes that Paul is likening himself to a slave being led to death, and I have not encountered a more persuasive alternative.

The second metaphor Paul uses is that of a fragrance (2:14b–16), and while it, too, may draw from Hellenistic imagery, it is more likely that he is referencing the cultic

⁸ She asks, “Did Paul, when present in a community, use his body to persuade, to exhort, or to inspire? If Paul expects the Galatians to understand his [*stigmata*] to be marks on his back, they are likely to have seen those marks, and, with or without his guidance, to have read the story of his punishments inscribed there. Perhaps when Paul stood in the midst of a congregation, he bared his back and offered an interpretation of the history of its markings, reminding his dubious audience that whips had similarly lacerated Jesus’ flesh” (103).

sacrificial system (see Kurek-Chomycz 2010). *Osmē* and *eōdia* occur together elsewhere in the Pauline corpus (Phil 4:18; Eph 5:2; cf. Gen 8:21 LXX), both times, clearly with that sense. The words are also found together in the New Testament in John 12:3 to describe the aroma of the perfume used by Mary of Bethany to anoint Jesus (par. Mark 14:3 where the alabaster jar must be broken open in order to be used). As Lim aptly concludes, “Paul establishes himself as God’s servant in manifesting the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ, and the manner of this manifestation is through his cruciformed life of suffering” (2009, 96).

Just as a cultic sacrifice only gives a fragrant aroma when it is burned, so for Paul, those who “proclaim the good news of Christ” (2:12) only spread the fragrance of knowing God when they offer their bodies to God as a living sacrifice.

The Function of Paul’s Bodily Suffering

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions from Paul’s self-references to his bodily suffering. Paul understands his physical afflictions as a natural consequence of his apostolic ministry (cf. Phil 1:29). They do not catch him by surprise, nor does he expect otherwise. In fact, the physical hardships he has endured result inevitably from identification with Christ, who suffered bodily, himself.

How, then, could it be different for those who proclaim him? Can any believer identify with Jesus without suffering physically (cf. 2 Cor 12:10; see Schnabel 2008, 133)? The one who follows the crucified Messiah will bear the marks of suffering consistent with *koinōnia* in his blood and body (1 Cor 10:16). For Paul, union with Christ “means that we must follow Christ’s own road to glory. . . . [T]he daily anxieties, tensions, and persecutions [in Rom 8:17] . . . are the lot of those who follow the one who was ‘reckoned with the transgressors’ (Luke 22:37). . . . Participation in Christ’s glory can come only through participation in his suffering” (Moo 1996, 505–506).

It is for this reason that Paul can admonish the church to imitate him in his service (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). Bodily suffering is not simply something he must experience as an apostle. It is the inevitable path for all who would imitate him as he imitates Jesus (cf. 2 Tim 3:12). Bodily suffering is normative for the preacher.⁹ Imitation is not along one axis only, in one dimension of life, alone. Paul is not simply charging the church to do verbal proclamation as he does it, for instance, but to follow the whole of Jesus' earthly example, including His physical suffering (cf. 1 Pet 2:21). Given Paul's cross-centered homiletic, it is imperative for him that the entirety of the preacher's life, including the preacher's body, be cruciform. This is the logical conclusion for anyone proclaiming a crucified Messiah. Preachers do not carry "in the body the death of Christ" (2 Cor 4:10) only in a spiritual sense but (also) a physical one.

So, Paul can point to those hardships he has faced in the course of his ministry as proof of his apostolic legitimacy. They validate his claims, adding credibility to his verbal proclamation as they give evidence that he has truly been crucified with Christ and died to the world (Gal 2:20; 6:14).¹⁰ Though culturally, his scars may be seen by the Romans as indicators of dishonor, so was Jesus' death on a cross. Shame or not, the body is the place where Jesus—both his suffering and his resurrection power—is manifested (2 Cor 4:10), and bodily suffering is not only inevitable for Paul, who serves Jesus in a hostile world, such affliction serves an apologetic function. The marks of his beatings display the sufferings of Christ, who was executed in weakness (2 Cor 13:4). Paul's body literally tells the story of the gospel. In this sense, his scars are persuasive in themselves; they serve a missional purpose (cf. Phil 2:17; 1 Thess 2:1–7, 17–20).¹¹

⁹ Commenting on Phil 3:10, O'Brien writes, "As Paul participates in Christ's sufferings, the tribulations through which every Christian must pass, so he desires to understand and experience the life-giving power of God, that power which he manifested in raising Christ from the dead, and which he now displays in the new life the Christian receives from the risen Christ and shares with him" (1991, 400). Later, explaining the meaning of *pathema*, he says, "At Rom. 8:18 and 2 Cor. 1:5-7 Paul uses the word to designate the afflictions in which all Christians participate as part of the sufferings of Christ. . . . All Christians participate in these sufferings; through them they enter to kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; cf. 1 Thes. 3:3, 7). Suffering with Christ is a necessary prerequisite to being glorified with him (Rom. 8:17). . . . Such afflictions may include physical sufferings such as imprisonment, floggings, beatings, hardships, and privations of different kinds (2 Cor. 11:23-28) as well as mental anguish (2 Cor. 1:4-11, esp. v. 8; 11:28). . . . Paul is not suggesting that he is actively seeking martyrdom. For him it was an honour to share in Christ's sufferings, to enter into a deeper and closer personal relationship with his Lord, and thus to become more like him each day. He also knew that to share in Christ's sufferings was evidence that he was truly one of the Messiah's people, destined for salvation and future glory (Phil. 1:29; Rom. 8:17)" (405-406).

¹⁰ Harris notes, "The link between suffering with Christ and dying with Christ is explicit in Phil. 3:10: participation in Christ's sufferings . . . is indistinguishable from conformity to his death. . . . To suffer for and with Christ is to die with Christ. For the Christian suffering is not a sign of divine disappointment but an opportunity for divine engagement" (2005, 349).

¹¹ Stettler (2000) suggests the possibility that Paul believed his ministry would lead to Christ's parousia. She argues that he saw his sufferings and the sufferings of the church as filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions; that is, they helped fill an affliction quota that must be met before Christ returns; cf. Bauckham 1975.

Scars do not simply tell a story;¹² they carry the fragrance of knowing Christ. Just as an alabaster jar carrying perfume needed to be broken in order to spread the aroma of the nard, so too does Paul's body, along with the bodies of all who seek to imitate Paul in his imitation of Christ, need "breaking." Paul understands his physical sufferings as normative for all who would follow his example.

Contemporary Considerations

We turn our attention now to considering some of the implications of our study for contemporary Christian witness. Paul reminds his readers that the body communicates every bit as much as words do. That said, he does not evince any of the typical concerns for the preacher's body that are raised by homileticians. He offers no instructions about what clothes to wear or how to stand or where to put one's hands. He certainly does not say anything about voice projection, nor are his writings about the preacher's body simply matters having to do with a speaker's perceived trustworthiness or what ancient rhetoricians like Aristotle classified as *ethos*.

At one level, this is obvious. It is no secret that preaching is more than elocution and delivery. It is impossible to separate the preacher's message from their body. A preacher who regularly indulges in fast food yet waxes on about self-control has little credibility. The harmful optics of someone proclaiming the crucified Christ while clad in a three-thousand-dollar blazer and thousand-dollar shoes, for instance, does not need belaboring.¹³ Not only is the call to imitate Paul in his bodily suffering normative for preachers, all Christians are called to a life of suffering. As missiologist Scott Sunquist says in a note on Mark 8:27–35, "Jesus' identity [is linked] with his suffering and glory, and links his followers' calling to cross-bearing. Bearing a cross is an image of self-denial and even death. It is a call to extreme obedience" (2013, 213).

In 21st century North America, should a preacher bear scars and other physical sufferings obtained in the service of Christ, these would serve to make the messenger more credible, helping to grant them a hearing. This is especially valuable at a time when many professing Christians have brought ill-repute to the name of Jesus, with some using their bodies in ways contrary to Paul's example. Bearing marks of affliction on one's body does more than enhance or adorn the gospel message. Without them, the

¹² Martyn, commenting on Galatians 6:17, says, "Considering his physique to be a major form of communication, alongside the words of his letter [to the church in Galatia], Paul points literally to his own body. He can do this because his body tells the story of the forward march of the gospel, just as do his words" (1997, 568).

¹³ See the @PreachersNSneakers Instagram account for examples.

message may simply be tuned out. No amount of eloquence and oratorical skill can substitute for embodied cruciformity.

Writing over one hundred years ago, the British preacher G. Campbell Morgan said, “[T]he man [sic] who preaches the Cross must be a crucified man. You may preach the Cross and it is nothing but a Roman gibbet unless you preach it from yourself. It is the crucified man that can preach the Cross. Said Thomas ‘Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails . . . I will not believe.’ Dr. Parker of London said that what Thomas said of Christ, the world is saying about the Church. And the world is saying to every preacher: Unless I see in your hands the print of the nails I will not believe” (1904, 59). His words of admonition are as relevant as they have ever been. Simply put, how can a preacher without any scars preach a crucified Messiah? The great missionary Amy Carmichael (1999) expressed this poetically.

Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;
I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star.
Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.
Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And piercèd are the feet that follow Me.
But thine are whole; can he have followed far
Who hast no wound or scar?

While the marks of suffering that covered Paul's body would not have been seen as emblems of honor in his day, today, the health, wealth, and upward mobility of many preachers is what threatens to undermine the gospel, and in fact, physical afflictions may bridge some cultural barriers.¹⁴

The preacher's wounded body also serves a more direct missional function; scars are proclamatory in and of themselves. (The social media post I saw as I was finishing this paper is not true for the apostle Paul. According to this post: "There is no way to preach the gospel with your life. You can affirm the gospel with your life but you cannot preach the gospel with your life. You can only preach the gospel by opening up your mouth & speaking forth the Word of God." Yet Paul is able to point to his scarred body and say otherwise.¹⁵) Michael Gorman says Paul "wanted the communities he addressed not merely to *believe* the gospel but to *become* the gospel, and in so doing to participate in the very life and mission of God" (2015, 2). (Thus, Gorman can call Pauline theology a theology of theosis.) As preachers grow in conformity to Christ, they do not simply tell good news with their lips, and they do more than embody it in their flesh; they become the gospel.

These conclusions raise several questions for contemporary preachers. For instance, if the body is essential for proclamation, what of gospel ministry in digital spaces, where content is disembodied from the messenger? If bodily suffering is normative in Paul's writings for those who preach Christ crucified, what of preachers who do not bear the marks of such afflictions? Paul's context is one of persecution; do scars look different for those who serve in nations that do not show up on Open Doors' World Watch List, in contexts where freedom of religion is a right defended by the state? These questions and others are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important that they are asked.

¹⁴ This certainly may not be the case in all cultures. Some parts of the world reflect the prevailing view in Paul's time "that a deity's approval meant earthly blessing, and inasmuch as the driving motive for much of the participation in the Greco-Roman civic cults was the desire for health, wealth, and status, Paul's suffering posed an immense cultural barrier to his gospel" (Hafemann 2000, 171).

¹⁵ As I write this, anti-Asian racism is on the rise around the world. Recently, Lee Wong, an Asian-American army veteran and elected official in Ohio, removed his shirt during a town hall meeting to show his scars as proof of his patriotism (see <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/27/981976788/asian-american-local-leader-shows-army-scars-is-this-patriot-enough>).

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