

'Walking the talk': Paul's authority in motion in 2 Corinthians 10–13

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One's gait or *incessus* served as a prominent visual indicator of moral character and status in ancient Graeco-Roman societies. Nobles, aristocrats and slaves walked differently. Linking on to this 'common-sense knowledge', Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians 10–13 shamed him publicly due to his inability to do the 'leadership walk' amongst the Corinthians. Whilst rhetorically engaging with these stereotypes, the apostle simultaneously deconstructs them with regard to the deep structure of the text. A new form of spiritual authority, which is also embodied in the weakness of Christ on the cross, surfaces in Paul's own bodily humiliations and apparent powerlessness.

'Om jou praat te loop': Paulus se outoriteit aan die beweeg in 2 Korintiërs 10–13. Individue se liggaamstaal of *incessus* was 'n prominente visuele aanduiding van morele karakter en status binne antieke Grieks-Romeinse gemeenskappe. Adelikes, aristokrate en slawe het almal op verskillende maniere geloop. In die lig van hierdie algemene kennis het Paulus se opponente in 2 Korintiërs 10–13 hom in die publiek verneder vanweë sy onvermoë om die 'leierskap-loop' te doen tussen die Korintiërs. Terwyl Paulus enersyds in gesprek tree met hierdie stereotipe idees, dekonstrueer hy dit in dieselfde asem ten opsigte van die dieptestruktuur van die teks. 'n Nuwe vorm van geestelike outoriteit, wat ook in die swakheid van Christus aan die kruis geleë is, kom na vore in Paulus se eie liggaamlike vernederings en oënskynlike kragteloosheid.

A physiognomic consciousness

The ancient Mediterranean world was a 'physiognomically-conscious' world (Hartstock 2008:58).¹ It was widely accepted that one could look into the souls of others by studying their bodily gestures. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (*Prior Analytics* 70b:6–7) was convinced that one could judge men's character from their physical appearance, whereas the Jewish sage, Jesus Sirach (*Sir* 19:30), assumed that the way a man walks shows what he is. Two extant treatises on physiognomy by Pseudo-Aristotle at approximately the end of the 4th century BCE and Polemo of Laodicea in the 2nd century CE also testify to this long-standing fascination of the correlation between 'innate psychological character and the construction or form of the body' (Swain 2007:11).²

Physiognomists assumed that individuals' appearance or physiology served as semiotic indications of their personality and character. On the basis of such stereotypes, one could make reasonable judgements of others' inner disposition.³ Besides this type of 'anatomical physiognomy', where the moral character of a person was studied in terms of physical characteristics and where specific facial features were associated with corresponding emotions, physiognomists also studied similarities in appearance between people and various kinds of animals (also called 'zoological physiognomy').⁴ At the same time, from an ethnographic perspective, the collective behaviour of races, nations and groups was linked to their

1. Parsons (2011:18) tells us that, although Hippocrates was the first person to use the term *φυσιογνωμονία*, Zophyrus already practised it in the 5th century BCE. He stigmatised Socrates as dumb and fond of women because 'he had not got hollows in the neck above the collarbone ...'.

2. Plutarch (*Parallel Lives*), in his descriptions of famous Greek and Roman public figures, frequently assumed a relationship between character and appearance. However, we should guard against taking all descriptions of people's physical appearance in ancient texts as expressions of the principles of physiognomy. In the *Medea* (516–519) of Euripedes, the latter asks: 'Why is there no mark engraved on men's bodies by which we could know the true one from the false one?' In turn, Plato (*Republic* 454C) explicitly warns that there is no so-called psychological difference between being bald or having long hair, since they have the same nature.

3. A full gait reflected loyalty, a noble mind, efficacy and no anger (Polemo, 50; cf. also Corbeill 2004:122).

4. Thus, '... when a physical feature is peculiar to a specific animal and that animal is characterized by specific character traits, the physiognomist may infer that persons with similar physical features share the inner nature of the corresponding animal' (Parsons 2011:23; cf. also Hartstock 2008:13–18; Malina & Neyrey 1996:100–152).

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distinctive physical features.⁵ As Sassi (2001:75–76) notes, physiognomists did not base their efficacy on ‘an exhaustive amassing of empirical data, but rather from a classification of the world oriented- and guaranteed- by ideological values’.⁶

Non-verbal bodily gestures and facial expressions served important communicative functions throughout antiquity. Rhetoricians, in particular, were keenly aware of the importance of gesture as part of the delivery (*hypokrisis* or *pronunciatio*) of speeches in public. These included facial expression, bodily movement and voice quality (Fögen 2009:23).⁷ As a matter of fact, in his well-known treatise on the education of the orator, Quintilian devotes numerous pages to the relationship between gait and permanent dispositions of character. He constantly admonishes speakers to be concerned about their *gravitas* and *dignitas*, their authority and dignity.⁸

Orators often reproached their opponents for the way they walked (cf. Quintilian *inst.* 11.3.66, 124, 126). Even small details such as eye movement or the way in which one brings one’s finger up to one’s head could offer an indication of inner character (Seneca *Ep.* 52.12). One’s *incessus* had ‘overtones’ of gait as indicative of character since bodily motion was generally understood as reflecting one’s inner nature. No wonder Cicero (*de Off.* 1.131) famously wrote that one’s manner of walking should be neither too delicate or excessively slow, nor too hasty. The latter could cause facial distortions, which could indicate that a person is not calm and collected (cf. also Krostenko 2001:72). Irregular forms of walking such as Cataline’s lopsided step (*Sal. Cat.* 15.5) or that of the young Tiberius (*Suet. Tib.* 68.3) were easily noticed and frowned upon.

The cultivation of virtue often started with bodily gestures and motions. For Cicero (*De off.* 1.100), pleasing bodily

motions were signs of virtues made visible.⁹ Walking was the performance of identity in motion. It showed how the ancients, in general, and the Romans, in particular, ‘... drew distinctions between work and play, body and mind, man and woman, “manly” and “effeminate”, rich and poor, citizen and slave, emperor and subject, child and adult, philosopher and student, republic and empire’ (O’Sullivan 2011:8).

Whilst one’s gait visibly reflected one’s identity and character in motion, it was also ‘... treated as a technique of the body susceptible to instruction and manipulation’ (O’Sullivan 2011:8). Seneca (*Ep.* 94.8–9) cites Aristot who makes fun of people teaching others: ‘*sic incede, sic cena, hoc viro, hoc feminae ...*’ [this is how you walk; this is how you dine; this is proper behaviour for a man; this is proper behaviour for a woman], without practising these principles themselves.

Women in Mediterranean society were expected to walk slowly and more softly, whilst men usually moved faster and with quick determination (cf. O’Sullivan 2011:22–28). A modest female gait in public reflected restraint and respect for traditional gender boundaries. According to Xenophon (*Oeconomicus* 7.22–23, 29–30), women were actually assigned to indoor tasks by God. Public mockery followed when men meddled with their wives’ work or when they walked effeminately.¹⁰ According to Polemo, one could recognise the gait of an effeminate or cowardly male by the fact that ‘... his loins do not hold still. And his slack limbs never stay in one position. He minces along with little jumping steps’ (cf. Parsons 2011:33). Thus:

the body that attracts attention to itself automatically excludes its bearer from the ranks of the upper-class male, and a particularly conspicuous or expressive gait – whether too fast or too slow – is an easy way to draw such attention (O’Sullivan 2011:20).¹¹

Ostentatious, effeminate and sexually suggestive ways of walking rendered men powerless and shameful in the eyes of others (cf. Seneca *Ep.* 52.12).

Nobles also walked differently from ordinary people. Cicero (*Leg. Agr.* 2.13) tells us that when Rullus was elected to the Roman tribune in 63 BCE, he adopted a different face, a different tone of voice and a different walk (*‘iam designatus alio voltu, alio vocis sono, alio incessu esse meditabatur’*). He goes to great lengths to expose Rullus’ hypocrisy (cf. Corbeil 2004:119), since, although one could try to disguise one’s

5. According to Parsons (2011:25), ‘[t]he body of the Roman male citizen was considered normative; races or ethnic groups exhibiting real or presumed deviations from that body type would be subject to denigration’. In turn, Popovic (2007:98) concurs with other researchers that the ideal human being was Greek, male and free. ‘This type of person is never explicitly described, but he forms the implicit point of reference against which others, i.e. women, barbarians, and animals are characterized as inferior.’ Perhaps the concept of ‘geocentrism’, as espoused by Malina and Neyrey (1996:120ff.), helps us in this regard. It assumes that ‘as a rule, people take their original bearings, the place in which they were born and raised and continue to live, as the centre of all directions ... To the Greeks Delphi was the navel of the universe (*Agathemerus* 1.2), a tradition celebrated by Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.74, 6.3) ... Jerusalem was given similar honours by Philo, the Alexandrian (Gaus 281).’

6. Thus, a bodily feature is judged according to the *general* impression produced by the individual, who is in turn influenced by that same feature and by the meaning it carries in a context clearly structured by a scale of social values’ (Sassi 2000: 53).

7. According to Demosthenes, first, second and third rank was attributed to delivery (Cicero, *Brutus* 142). One’s voice, facial expressions and hands served as important forms of expression, since the orator could use them ‘with a level of sophistication almost comparable to that of verbal speech’ (Fögen 2009:30).

8. It was definitely not only rhetoricians whose gestures communicated emotions and character. Athenæus (*Deipn.* 1.20c-d), for instance, refers to a dancer, named Memphis, who was able to explain Pythagorean philosophy much more clearly by way of his dancing than many philosophers through their teachings. Necrologies and epitaphs also made reference to people’s gait such as a certain Jovian’s heavy step (*‘incedebat autem motu corporis gravi’* – cf. Den Boeft et al. 2011:31), or that a woman, named Claudia, from the time of the Gracchi, which refers to her charming speech and attractive gait (*‘sermone lepido, tum autem incessu commoda’*; CIL 6.15346).

9. Cicero presents the body as a kind of language or oratory of the body. When inner constancy and harmony find their expression in natural external gestures the result is grace, beauty and dignity’ (Jaeger 2000:112). Jaeger (2000:113) also points out how Ambrose picked up on these ideas in his adaptation of *De officiis* by pointing out that the body is a voice of the soul. He rejected a friend’s membership in the clergy, because his gestures were in poor taste, whilst he instructed another cleric never to walk in front of him because of his gait. Ambrose predicted the fall of both on account of the irregularity of their gait. Apparently, his prediction became true, since one fell into heresy and the other into impiety. On his part, John Chrysostom wrote that a priest had to be an example of modesty in all things: looks, gait and conversation (*De Sacer.* d.1.3)

10. In *Clodium et Curi onem* 22, Cicero lashes out at Clodius’ female dress and his ‘music girl’s walk’. He has a female expression, speaks in a high voice, and ‘lifts lightly the body’ (*‘laevare corpus potes’*).

11. Aristotle also referred to the slow movements of the ‘*megalopsychos*’ [great souled man] (*Eth. Nic.* 1125a).

gait, all individuals have a particular way of walking that is part and parcel of their physical person. 'In this sense, the gait is similar to the face: they both convey individual and familial identity' (O'Sullivan 2011:15).¹² Nobles were instructed to walk slowly, but then again 'not too slow, for that marks a lack of effectiveness' (Corbeill 2004:122). The Emperor Augustus was famous for his cryptic motto: *σπεῦδε βραδέως* [hurry up slowly] (cf. Suet. Aug. 25.4). Excessive slowness could reflect an inactive mind. Whereas the ideal male walked with total control, 'his head and shoulders upright and confident, metaphorically towering over those beneath him' (O'Sullivan 2011:21), slaves went about in a hurry. Plautus tells us via one of his characters in his *Poenulus* (522–523) that it is the mark of a slave to run about.¹³

A problem in Corinth: Paul's weak σώμα

Let's turn our attention now to the apostle Paul and the 'problem' of his weak σώμα, according to some members of the church in Corinth. Their concern with the inconsistency between Paul's physical appearance and his apostolic authority (cf. for example 1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 10:1, 10; 12:7) should be interpreted against the backdrop of the physiognomic consciousness that permeated the ancient Graeco-Roman world.¹⁴ Although well-known teachers such as Epictetus did, in fact, teach their students not to make judgements on external aspects, 'since the essential identifying component of an individual's persona is not the outward appearance, but appropriate conduct' (cf. Nguyen 2008:96), Paul could neither escape the critical eye of the Corinthian believers nor that of a group of itinerant teachers in their midst (2 Cor 10–13).¹⁵ His feeble bodily presence (ἡ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος; 2 Cor 10:10)¹⁶ was a cause for concern to them.

Speaking of Paul's opponents ...

There is no agreement regarding the identity of Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Scholars usually identify them as belonging to one of the following groups: 'advocates of Gentiles adopting circumcision, Sabbath, and food laws from the Torah, Gnostics, "divine men", and Pneumatics' (Sumney 2005:14). Although unresolved questions regarding

12. In Seneca's *Troades* (464–468), we hear of Astyanax who inherited his father Hector's gait and bodily features.

13. The strong emphasis on gait or *incessus* in Graeco-Roman culture was also visible in the Jewish world, as Parsons (2006:39ff.) and Shi (2008:183) point out. Thus, Philo could state that a slave possessed a 'naturally slavish body' (*Quod Omn* 40), whilst *The Testament of Naphtali* (2.2–9) could devote a long discussion to the correlation between outer appearance and character. An important study on physiognomy in four Dead Sea Scrolls by Popovic (2007) shows how widespread these perceptions on the relationship between body and character were in ancient Jewish circles.

14. Albl (2007:156) points out that soma in Paul refers 'to the physical body (e.g. Gl 6:17), but it also has the wider meaning of one's "self" – the whole person'. In similar terms, Loader (2012:174) states that, for Paul, soma referred to the body as an integrated whole 'with a focus on the bodily aspect, but not the body in any way separable from soul or spirit'.

15. Although Epictetus had long hair, a beard and a rough cloak, he rejected the emphasis on outward features that identified individuals as philosophers. In one of his discourses (4.8), he is highly upset with those 'who pretentiously display themselves as philosophers ...'. Consequently, he accentuates that the essential identifying component of an individual's persona is not the outward appearance, but appropriate conduct (Nguyen 2008:98). Epictetus stresses that Socrates was known as a great philosopher, despite his outward appearance (4.8.22–29).

16. Further references to 2 Corinthians will be indicated only by chapters and verses.

the literary integrity of 2 Corinthians complicates this question to some extent (since the relationship between 2 Corinthians 10–13 and the rest of the canonical 2 Corinthians remains uncertain), Paul offers some indications regarding the nature and identity of his adversaries. Amongst others, he states that these itinerant teachers claimed to be apostles (cf. his sarcastic reference to the 'superlative' apostles in 11:5 and 12:11). At the same time, their boasting of their Jewish heritage, their excellent letters of recommendation (10:12, 18) as well as their spiritual accomplishments, miracles and visionary experiences served as signs of their superlative status over against that of Paul (cf. also Barentsen 2011:114; Watson 2007:152ff). More to the point, they probably challenged Paul's apostolic claims by stressing his unimpressive appearance in order to rhetorically win the Corinthians' favour for their own Christological views. However, as Sumney (2005) correctly points out that:

the only theological point about which Paul finds it necessary to argue with them is that of the image of the apostle/minister. In contrast to them, he contends that ministry must be constructed in a way that reflects the crucified (and raised) Christ. (p. 17)

From a physiognomic perspective, these itinerant Jewish-Christian teachers presented themselves to the Corinthians as honourable persons by stressing their unblemished Jewish descent (11:22), polished rhetorical abilities (11:7) and 'correct' serving of Christ (11:23). Both their physical appearance and their honourable origins semiotically articulated their moral personalities. Whereas they lived up to the ideal Jewish male form (cf. Parsons 2011:39ff.), Paul's deviation from the norm gave rise to the charges that he lived according to the principles of his weak human flesh (κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦντας –10:2); that he was foolish (ἄφρων –12:11), cunning and deceptive (ὑπάρχων –12:16). In short, he was a servile fraudster.

A Physical Weakness or Merely Physiognomic Rhetoric?

According to the majority of scholars (cf. e.g. Choi 2010:237; Loader 2012:398; Martin 1995:35), a physical deformity or persistent medical condition hampered the apostle's message. This caused Paul's opponents to emphasise his body's weakness as proof of his weakness of character. However, a small group of scholars interpret 10:10 not so much as an observation of Paul's actual appearance, but rather as an expression of the Graeco-Roman rhetoric of manhood. According to Harrill (2001:190) and Shi (2008:183ff.), it actually had little to do with a description of Paul's physical condition. Rather, the aim of his opponents was to cast him in the role of a servile slave and flatterer: 'To accuse a person of a weak bodily presence and deficient speech is to call that person a slavish man unfit for public office or otherwise to dominate others' (Harrill 2001:204).

Against the backdrop of the pervasive physiognomic consciousness in the Mediterranean world, the interaction between Paul and his opponents entailed more than a mere ridicule of the apostle's physical disability or unpleasant outward appearance. However, since his opponents

were Jewish, the ‘physiognomic connection between somatic inferiority – a weak, ugly bodily presence – and the condition of natural slavery’ (Harrill 2001:201) would probably not take centre stage in their dispute. This type of vilification was more at home in debates amongst the Graeco-Roman elite. Indeed ‘the similarities between Jewish and sophistic physiognomics may well have facilitated the adoption of pagan sophistry by Paul’s Judeo-Christian opponents in Corinth’ (Van Kooten 2008:167). However, in Jewish physiognomics, individuals’ physical appearance was of great importance. More to the point, unblemished bodies, as part of strict purity requirements, were non-negotiable (e.g. Lv 21:16–18).¹⁷ There was always a strong physiognomic connection between outward physical attributes of priests and Israelites, and their inner purity. Even Jewish religious rituals functioned along similar physiognomic lines.¹⁸ Therefore, we could assume that the observation of the weakness of Paul’s σῶμα in the eyes of his opponents included his physical appearance. They had in mind his whole person, since they read Paul’s inward person from the outward. Whereas the apostle’s bodily weakness served as a sign of his active yielding to the power of the resurrected Christ for himself (cf. also Walker 2002:259), the ‘physical story’ of his bodily presence, for the opponents called into question his entire apostolic ministry.¹⁹

In all probability, Paul’s bodily scars, which resulted from numerous beatings and floggings (11:23–25), were the root of the problem, since, as Glancy (2004:109) tells us: ‘dishonorable bodies were whippable; honorable bodies were not’. These scars of dishonour, which set him apart from his opponents, proclaimed to the Corinthians ‘that his bodily integrity, a prerequisite of masculine dignity as well as social and political status, had been violated on numerous occasions’ (Larson, quoted in Lim 2009:179). Paul’s opponents used these and other classificatory grids from their Jewish background to construct his body in such a fashion as to destroy his character. Once it could be established that his *soma* did not live up to the expectations of an able-bodied apostle, they had a strong case to effectively disparage all facets of his work.²⁰ Therefore, they

17. Cultic cleanliness for priests, in particular, but also for ordinary Israelites, who took part in cultic activities at the temple, implied the absence of long lists of physical blemishes. Whilst some scholars are baffled by the absence of similar lists of ‘moral blemishes’, Balentine (quoted in Parsons 2011:41) states: ‘In Israel’s priestly system the concern for wholeness and integrity of the physical body is an extension of the understanding that God’s holiness is perfect and complete. Holy and unblemished persons (and sacrifices) are external expressions of the requirement to be holy as God is holy.’

18. Gruenewald is of the opinion that, in Israel’s rituals, the orderly and correct sequence of activities was much more emphasised than an individual’s inner disposition, and that the ritual was an act of meaning-making in itself. He (Gruenewald 2003:12–13) even compares it to the trust people place in recipes, which ‘is as strong as the trust religious people have in the efficacy of ritual prescriptions, as defined in their scriptures’. Perhaps a physiognomic approach to Israel’s rituals would have made it clear that the strict adherence to the various components of any ritual that coherently brings about the desired result is based upon the underlying principle that correct participation therein by unblemished bodies was indicative of unblemished moral character.

19. Since one’s social status was somatically expressed in Graeco-Roman ethos, not only Paul’s apostolic integrity, but probably also his manhood was questioned by his critics (Shi 20:250).

20. By denigrating his body and character, Paul could also be deprived of the moral claim to persuade (cf. in this regard also Barton 1994:96–97).

emphasised that Paul’s rhetorical skills were insufficient (1 Cor 1:20) and his speech ‘contemptible’, whilst he also lacked wisdom (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1–4). In so doing, they impugned Paul’s authority ‘by pointing out his overall weakness: his physical body, his speech, his whole person is weak’ (Albl 2007:156).

A new leadership based on a different theology of the cross ... and the body

Challenging physiognomic stereotypes: A different Jesus is also a weak Jesus

Paul’s response to his opponents in 2 Corinthians 10–13 entails more than a rhetorical rebuttal of their shallow displays of σύγκρισις.²¹ It is not about two different constructs of the σῶμα what is at stake and not about two opposing Christologies and two different forms of spiritual leadership. Paul is convinced that his opponents proclaim a different Jesus (11:4–6).²² In view of their response to Paul’s weak body, we may assume that they saw the earthly Jesus as a ‘perfect σῶμα’. However, for Paul, to know Jesus in such a way, is to know him κατὰ σάρκα (5:16). Paul’s understanding of the weakness of Jesus (e.g. 4:7–12; 13:4) fundamentally challenges this view of a glorious Jesus clothed in physiognomic perfection.

Although Paul knows that the resurrected Christ is filled with divine glory (4:4–5), he deliberately chooses to model his apostolic ministry on the suffering of the earthly Jesus. He knows that the character of Jesus, his gentleness, faithfulness, humility, graciousness, generosity, truth, et cetera (cf. Stegman 2005:144ff.), is revealed in his humble existence and the numerous humiliations he had to suffer. Jesus’ inglorious earthly presence and death accentuate that true Christian character cannot be deduced from these physiognomic principles, which Paul’s opponents so rigorously apply. The shameful humiliations that accompanied the life-giving death of Jesus provide an entirely different understanding of body, character and reality. This contradicts the general perception that the bodies and gait of the gods eventually revealed their true identity during secret visits to earth. Even when they tried to conceal their identity, the flowing stride, demeanour and speech of the gods soon gave them away (cf. Virgil *Aen* 5.647–9). The earthly route of Jesus is different. His body and gait did not reveal his divine identity in similar fashion. Paradoxically, the crucifixion of Jesus in weakness is the testimony to his true identity and power (13:4). It is the culmination ‘of a life lived for the sake of others, a life characterized by humility and suffering in giving oneself for the service of others’ (Stegman 2005:208).

Paul’s leadership strategy entails fundamentally challenging the stereotypes and mental images of the Corinthians. This

21. Σύγκρισις refers to the methods whereby individuals amplified their own virtues and achievements in the Graeco-Roman world, whilst depreciating those of their enemies (Marshall 1987:325).

22. The explicit mention of ἡσους in this context refers to their understanding of the earthly Jesus.

is a task of epistemic proportions. Not only does he have to confront widely accepted physiognomic perceptions, but also disprove basic Mediterranean conventions regarding honour and shame. Undoubtedly, the residents of Corinth would have idealised individuals who enjoyed public honour, whilst disregarding socially expendables such as the poor, the humble and the weak. However, since effective leaders know that they must provoke others to think outside the framework of their flawed ideological constructs of reality, Paul deliberately shifts the debate away from the stereotypical physiognomic interpretation of *σώμα* to a new Christological reinterpretation thereof. In this regard, he makes it clear that one's body and gait cannot be interpreted as an objective form of identity in motion, since God's power is now paradoxically revealed in the weakness of his own Son ... and that of his apostle!

Paul's anti-physiognomist approach – or is it a radically new form of physiognomy from the perspective of the cross? – is summarised in 2 Corinthians 10–13 as 'power in weakness'. This is reflected in the earthly route of Jesus, which is the new orientation point for Paul's apostolic ministry. He knows: *'Die Schwachheit gilt nicht mehr als Mangel am Vollmacht und wird nicht mehr nur als Ende und Grenze menschlicher Kraft erfahren, sondern zu Verheissungsträgerin aufgewertet und als Ansatzpunkt für das Wirkksamwerden der Kraft Christi erkannt'* (Heckel 1993:107–108).²³

Prototypical leadership: Carrying the weakness of Jesus in the body

The risen Christ reveals his power in a paradoxical way in the weakness of Paul. In fact, the various forms of affliction, tribulation and persecution he has to face up to (cf. 1:5–11; 2:12–16; 4:7–12; 6:3–10; 11:24–32²⁴) are the starting point for the revelation of the power of Christ.²⁵ The authentic humanity of Jesus is visible in Paul's own suffering, since he is not ashamed to carry the marks of Jesus on his body. Paradoxically, these weaknesses, 'which were likely perceived by his opponents as marks of servile submission and insignia of humiliation which were unworthy of any man of social standing, dignity and honour' (Shi 2008:250), now serve as proofs of the correct Christian walk. Paul's modesty is not merely:

a friendly way to wear his authority in the church, but the very ground of his authority. As Christ's death yielded to God's power in resurrection, so Paul's weakness gives way to Christ's power. (Walker 2002:259)

Paul is not a self-appointed martyr who endures suffering in stoical fashion. Indeed, he knows that neither medals of

23. Apart from redefining the body in terms of the suffering of Jesus, Paul also offers eschatological hope to the believers in terms of their weak *soma*. He knows that, although their outward *anthrōpos* is wasting away (4:16), their inner person is in the process of constant transformation into God's image. Over against those itinerant teachers who 'sell the word of God by retail' (2:17), he stresses the need to experience an inward transformation, which affects the inner man and puts him through a process of a steady, glorious growth that gradually and increasingly turns him into the image of God and Christ (3:18–4:4; 4:16; Van Kooten 2008:179).

24. 2 Corinthians 12:10 probably serves as a climactic statement that refers to four types of weakness about which the apostle is joyfully boasting as well as content in *ὕψ* Χριστοῦ.

25. As Choi (2010:238) puts it: *'Die Schwachheit ist das Wirkungsfeld, das die Kraft Christi offenbart und bewirkt.'*

honour await him here on earth nor accolades from grateful crowds. Clearly, his:

deliberate adoption of the posture of a socially and economically disadvantaged person embarrasses the Corinthians because they expect Paul to assume the role of a leader in a socially accepted sense. (Lim 2009:192)

Still, he is not resigned to the fate of his sufferings or even defined by them, since he understands his weaknesses as opportunities to reveal the resurrection power of Christ. Therefore, Paul actively surrenders his own comfort, safety, health and self-advancement in order to be a worthy bearer of the life-giving power of Christ. He knows that, in order to know Christ, he must also rely on him:

to survive bodily ailments, hardships, and sufferings recognizing that the power does not come from himself. Likewise, he is not the source of his own power; he cannot assert his authority in a heavy-handed or egocentric way. (Wallace 2011:248)

The resurrection life of Jesus is revealed in Paul's body when he carries the dying of Jesus in his body (*τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες*; 4:10). Thus, the story of Jesus is his life story and his operational narrative from beginning to end.

Even when Paul experiences extraordinary revelations such as being taken away to paradise (12:1–10), he does not define his ministry in terms of such events. In the words of Schnelle (2003):

Auch angesichts solcher Offenbarungen und Gnadenerweise Gottes bleibt Paulus seiner theologischen Grundsatzposition treu. Während die Gegner durch Spezialoffenbarungen die Gemeinde zu beeindrucken suchen und sich somit ihrer eigenen Fähigkeiten rühmten, bleibt dies Paulus versagt ... (p. 283)

Paul's reference to this rapture with or without a physical body (*σώμα*) is more than an apocalyptic 'Himmelreise der Seele' (cf. Heinger 1996:250). Although only God knows the answer to his exact mode of travel, there is an ironical twist in Paul's reference to this 'in or out of body' experience. The poetic structure of 12:1–4 underscores his lack of understanding of the nature of this extraordinary event, but it also leaves open the suggestion that he could even have been in the third heaven with his weak *σώμα*. Paul's description gives a mysterious aura to this experience, but it also suggests that this journey to the third heaven, narrated in the third person, could have been undertaken with the very same body that his opponents now ridicule.²⁶

Paul's wholehearted identification with Jesus is exemplary. Not only does he passionately teach Christ crucified, but he also replicates the life of Jesus in his apostolic ministry. His self-sacrificial leadership serves as existential proof of the truth of his gospel. Simultaneously, Paul follows Christ as a slave and humbly embraces the new life in Christ as an example to the Corinthians. They must follow in his

26. The contrast between Paul's suffering and his revelatory experience is stressed in 11:24–33 and 12:1–10. The same Paul that had been 'humiliatingly let down the Damascus wall in a net like so much merchandise' (11:33) is the one 'to be powerfully whisked up to the heights of Paradise to hear the voice of God – the whole point of the exercise' (Barnett 1997:562).

footsteps by understanding that any suffering they might undergo as a result should be seen in light of the cross of Christ (Agosto 2005:105).

A different understanding of the cross leads to a different speech repertoire and a new form of authority

For Paul's opponents, terms such as ἀσθενής signify a morally suspect person (10:10), and ταπεινός (10:1) signals visible shame and humiliation. However, the apostle opts to fill these and similar terms with positive meaning by associating them with Jesus' earthly life and his conformity to Christ crucified. Thus, Paul's language of weakness and suffering in 2 Corinthians 10–13 is more than rhetorical jargon employed as part of a so-called 'Narrenrede' to gain the moral upper hand over his opponents. It forms a crucial part of his self-understanding and his 'speech repertoire' (cf. Wardhaugh 2010:132).²⁷ Over against the opponents' power language, he chooses a vocabulary of powerlessness to give expression to the scandal of the cross and the nature of his apostolic ministry. In addition, Paul celebrates his weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and misfortunes for the sake of Christ, (ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι; 12:10).

Paul refuses to adapt his message to create a favourable reputation for himself, since his 'theology of proclamation did not allow him to adapt the message of the crucified Christ in this way' (Clarke 2008:163). He knows that he does not possess the necessary leadership credentials or public standing to fit into the mould of his opponents and some believers in Corinth. The *imitatio* of Jesus is Paul's only 'claim to fame'. His authority is grounded in 'walking the talk', not in explicit verbal claims to apostolic authority. Surely, as the divinely appointed messenger of Christ, Paul possesses the necessary authority to both command and demand strict obedience to his instructions, and he does so occasionally. However, when a new understanding of the σῶμα is at stake, his only recourse is to the example of Jesus. The cross provides the interpretive paradigm for his new understanding of the body as well as for the content of his speech repertoire.

Paul employs this new speech repertoire of humility to give expression to his understanding of the cross and his mimetic apostolic ministry. He follows Jesus and leads the church by serving in weakness. As the slave of Jesus, Paul embodies the 'correct' spiritual authority. His leadership is relational and mimetic, not authoritarian or strictly hierarchical. When the heart of the Gospel is at stake, a good example (and a weak body!) is worth more than a thousand words. Paul personifies a new form of apostolic authority

27. Speech repertoire refers to the communicative competence of individual speakers (cf. Wardhaugh 2010:132). A speech repertoire includes the unique meanings assigned by speakers to specific linguistic concepts that might differ from the meanings which other speakers assign to the same terms. From this perspective, Paul and his opponents use the same terms, but with totally different emotional connotations attached to them. From a persuasive point of view, Paul endeavours to change the meanings assigned by his readers to the various weakness-related concepts he uses in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Clearly, he wants to align their distinctive verbal repertoires in terms of the formative impact of the cross on their understanding of honour and shame. Paul is well aware that this alignment is extremely important since 'each speech community in which that person participates has its distinctive speech repertoire; in fact, one could argue that this repertoire is its defining feature' (Wardhaugh 2010:132).

in motion, one that persuades primarily without words. It resonates with the life of Jesus. In a paradoxical way, Paul's humble leadership walk reveals the power of Christ to transform 'physiognomically-conscious' individuals into humble servants. It offers hope to weak bodies to stop manipulating and superficially improving their gestures and gait. The true body and gait to be imitated is that of Jesus. As long as leaders proclaim, teach and imitate him and his message, they are examples to be emulated by their followers. Only in this sense does Paul possess authority. He must humbly walk this talk and fearlessly talk about this walk.

Clarke (2008) beautifully captures the essence of Paul's mimetic leadership:

Paul does not see himself as an exclusive and normative figure for his readers to follow. More significantly, Paul draws attention to the model of Christ that he is following, and privileges this over his own, and urges others so to follow Christ. (p. 183)

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