

## 2 Corinthians 1. (Notes of address.)

Our reading for this evening is taken from the first chapter of 2 Corinthians.

As you can imagine, it would be impossible for me to expound the whole of a chapter which comprises 24 verses in the time available. I shall therefore read, and comment on, only the first half of the chapter, together with two verses towards the close.

And so, 2 Corinthians 1, verse 1...

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed<sup>1</sup> be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all encouragement,<sup>2</sup> who encourages us in all our affliction, that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.

For just as *the sufferings* of Christ abound towards us, so<sup>3</sup> also *our encouragement* abounds through Christ.<sup>4</sup> If we are afflicted, it is for<sup>5</sup> *your* encouragement and salvation. If we are encouraged, it is for *your* encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings which we suffer. And our hope for you is firmly grounded, for we know that, as you share the sufferings, you also share the encouragement.

For we do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, about the affliction which happened to us in Asia. For we were exceedingly burdened,<sup>6</sup> beyond our strength,<sup>7</sup> so that we despaired even of life itself.

But *we ourselves* had the sentence of death in *ourselves*, that we should not rely on *ourselves*, but on God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great<sup>8</sup> a death, and who will deliver us; in whom we trust<sup>9</sup> that He will continue to deliver us, you also helping together by prayer for us, that thanks may be given on our behalf by many<sup>10</sup> for the gift bestowed on us through the prayers of many.<sup>11</sup>

Now down to verse 21 ...

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ, and who has anointed us, is God, who also has sealed us, and has given us the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts.

As we might expect, Paul opens his letter with a conventional form of salutation, comprising the three elements common to all of his epistles and to other correspondence of his day; namely, (i) the name of the writer, (ii) the names of the intended recipients, and (iii) a greeting. We note that he is careful, at the outset of his letter, to assert his divinely-appointed apostleship, which he knew was being seriously challenged by some at Corinth.<sup>12</sup>

Following his salutation, Paul begins his letter proper with an outburst of praise and thanksgiving. But before we look at this, I want to draw attention to one particular word which occurs, in one form or another, no less than ten times between verse 3 and verse 7. It is the word which the translation above renders 'encouragement'<sup>13</sup> or, as a verb,<sup>14</sup> 'encourage', 'encourages' or 'encouraged'.

This is certainly one of the key words of the letter, appearing 29 times in all,<sup>15</sup> and flies like a banner over the entire epistle, from this opening paragraph<sup>16</sup> right across to the closing paragraph.<sup>17</sup>

The word Paul uses covers a wide range and wealth of meanings,<sup>18</sup> and I am aware that many translations render the word as 'comfort' or 'consolation' in our section ... and, yes, I believe that is the correct translation in some contexts elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> But I am satisfied that here (as in other sections in this epistle) the primary reference is to 'encouragement',<sup>20</sup> and in part at least to the encouragement which God provided to the apostle both by his long-awaited meeting with Titus, and by the good news which Titus brought him at that time about the response of the Corinthian saints to his (Paul's) earlier letter.<sup>21</sup>

I am in full agreement, therefore, with Warren Wiersbe, who entitled his short commentary on this letter, 'Be Encouraged'. And I note in passing that this particular word is often used outside of scripture of the rallying call to troops about to go into battle, encouraging them to fight.<sup>22</sup>

### Verse 3.

The opening clause of Paul's outburst of praise and thanksgiving here echoes similar benedictions, found both in the Old Testament<sup>23</sup> and in first-century synagogue worship.<sup>24</sup>

As you likely know, the full opening expression of praise mirrors exactly the expressions of praise in both Ephesians 1 and 1 Peter 1.

But, whereas the expression of praise in *Ephesians 1* focuses on the Christian's past blessings,<sup>25</sup> and, whereas the expression of praise in *1 Peter 1* whets our appetite with the vision of the Christian's future blessings,<sup>26</sup> the apostle's outburst of praise *here* points us rather to the Christian's present blessings.<sup>27</sup> Taken together therefore, these three benedictions highlight what God *has already* accomplished, *will yet* accomplish, and is *even now* accomplishing for us His people.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was facing two distinct forms of 'affliction', and he later speaks twice of being 'afflicted *in every way*'.<sup>28</sup> As he said later, from *outside* he faced conflicts, strife and opposition, and *inside* he suffered fears and anxiety. As we will see shortly, he has occasion to cite one instance of his *outward* affliction later in the chapter from which I read,<sup>29</sup> and at the beginning of the following chapter he will refer to an occasion of acute *inward* affliction which he had suffered in the recent past.<sup>30</sup> And in different ways he suffered both these forms of affliction on account of the Corinthians.<sup>31</sup>

This letter begins on a somewhat different note to that which opened his earlier letter 'to the church at Corinth', that which we know as 'First Corinthians'. There he began by thanking God for *the grace* which God had given them, and for *the spiritual gifts* with which He had enriched them.<sup>32</sup> Here he begins by praising God for the *encouragement*<sup>33</sup> and the *past deliverance*<sup>34</sup> which God had granted to him, although he knew that the encouragement which *he* (Paul) had received would overflow to them.<sup>35</sup>

But first, the apostle introduces his readers to God as both the Source of mercies<sup>36</sup> and the Supplier of encouragement.<sup>37</sup>

And the One of whom Paul wrote in chapter 1 verse 17 of his epistle to the Ephesians as '*the Father of glory*',<sup>38</sup> and of whom James wrote in chapter 1 verse 17 of his epistle that He is '*the Father of lights*',<sup>39</sup> is here given the title, '*the Father of mercies*',<sup>40</sup> 'the Father of' being a common Jewish idiom indicating that He is the source and the originator of these things.<sup>41</sup> And God, Paul is saying, is the source and originator of tender feelings of pity, sympathy and compassion,<sup>42</sup> especially 'for *the ills* of others'.<sup>43</sup> And, no less than had David of old, we certainly needed 'the multitude' of God's 'compassions' (the same word in the Greek Old Testament as here) 'for *our ills*' – to blot out *our* transgressions!<sup>44</sup>

But not only that. For the One of whom Paul spoke *elsewhere* as '*the God of endurance*',<sup>45</sup> '*the God of hope*',<sup>46</sup> '*the God of peace*',<sup>47</sup> and '*the God of love and peace*',<sup>48</sup> is here given the title (not, I note, simply 'of encouragement', but) '*the God of all encouragement*'.<sup>49</sup> And, with my eye on this verse, along with Peter's description of our God as '*the God of all grace*',<sup>50</sup> I suspect it would be true to say that these are two things on which *God has the monopoly* – 'encouragement' and 'grace'.<sup>51</sup>

#### **Verses 4-7.**

But if verse 3 tells us what God is, verses 4 to 11 tells us what He does; namely, first, that He encourages us *in and through* our trials,<sup>52</sup> and, second, that He often (although not always<sup>53</sup>) sees fit to deliver us *out of* our trials.<sup>54</sup>

As Paul dictated his letter, with hindsight he could see two distinct benefits which had resulted from his past 'affliction'.

**First**, he could see that the encouragement which he had received personally from God had trained, equipped and enabled him to encourage more effectively others who were called on to pass through similar<sup>55</sup> (if not always identical<sup>56</sup>) trials and troubles to those which he had suffered himself.<sup>57</sup>

And we can hardly miss the word '*that*' in verse 4. 'The God of all encouragement', Paul says, 'encourages us in all our affliction, that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction ...'.<sup>58</sup>

Yes, we know the Lord can encourage His people directly *by His Spirit*.<sup>59</sup> And, yes, we know the Lord can encourage His people *through His word*.<sup>60</sup>

But not infrequently, He chooses to use other believers to do it.<sup>61</sup> And no one knew that better than the apostle.

We have only to think (i) of the glowing testimony which he gave in Colossians 4 to three men, who were not only his fellow-countrymen, but, as he says, were his 'fellow-workers for the kingdom of God', and who, and I quote, 'have been *an encouragement* to me',<sup>62</sup> and (ii) of that which Paul said about Titus in chapters 2 and 7 of *this very epistle*, where the apostle looked back on a period in his life of bitter disappointment and discouragement.

In chapter 2 the apostle said, 'When I came to Troas ... I had no rest in my spirit because I did not find Titus my brother'.<sup>63</sup> But then, in contrast, in chapter 7 he was able to say, 'I am filled with *encouragement*; I am overflowing with joy in spite of all our affliction. For indeed, when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way; outside were fightings, inside were fears. But God, *who encourages* the downcast, *encouraged us* by the coming of Titus ...'.<sup>64</sup>

What a tremendous blessing men like Aristarchus, John Mark, Jesus Justus, and Titus must have been to Paul in the midst of his many trials.<sup>65</sup> And yet, as you may have noted, he speaks *here* in chapter 1 of something rather different.

For *now* he speaks of one believer's personal experience of God-sent encouragement as that which prepares him or her to come alongside *another believer who is passing through the same kind of experience*, and to provide that second believer with such sympathy and encouragement as can come only from someone who has passed that same way.<sup>66</sup>

Let me cite just a more recent example. It is well known that there were times when C. H. Spurgeon suffered from acute attacks of despondency and depression. I will let the great man tell in his own words of one incident relevant to our passage for this evening:

One Sabbath morning, I preached from the text, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" and though I did not say so, yet I preached my own experience.

I heard my own chains clank while I tried to preach to my fellow-prisoners in the dark; but I could not tell *why I was brought into such an awful horror of darkness* ...

On the following Monday evening, a man came to see me who bore all the marks of despair upon his countenance. His hair seemed to stand upright, and his eyes were ready to start from their sockets.

He said to me, after a little parleying, "I never before, in my life, heard any man speak who seemed to know my heart. Mine is a terrible case; but on Sunday morning you painted me to the life, and preached as if you had been inside my soul".

By God's grace I saved that man from suicide, and led him into gospel light and liberty; but I know *I could not have done it if I had not myself been confined in the dungeon in which he lay*.<sup>67</sup>

But I said earlier that Paul could see *two* distinct benefits which had resulted from his past 'affliction'. The first was the way in which this prepared him to minister encouragement to others who faced the same or similar trials and affliction, and, in so doing, to bring them that which served their best interests.<sup>68</sup>

But there was a **second** benefit. For the effect of his most severe affliction (when he felt so utterly weighed down, beyond human powers of endurance – when he was brought so low that, as he said, he 'despaired even of life itself'<sup>69</sup>) ... the effect, I say, of this horrendous experience was to totally shatter every last vestige of his self-confidence, and to cast him without reserve on God. For at that time Paul felt himself to be so overwhelmed and *hemmed in* by his circumstances that the *only direction* he could look was *up!*

Indeed, so keenly did he feel himself to be under 'the sentence of death' that, as he saw it, his only possible resource at the time was, in his own words, 'God, *who raises the dead*'.<sup>70</sup> Talk about being brought to the end of oneself!

I suspect that, at that point, the apostle would have had no problem relating to Annie Johnson Flint's memorable expression, 'When we reach the end of our hoarded resources'.<sup>71</sup> And I suggest that those words, coming from someone who was herself no stranger to great suffering and loss,<sup>72</sup> captured Paul's sentiments 'to a T'.<sup>73</sup> At that time God had kicked away Paul's last prop!

'Exceedingly *burdened*, beyond our strength, so that we *despaired* even of life itself', Paul wrote. I make no apology for quoting again from Mr Spurgeon – this time from one of his sermons:

'In heaviness we often learn lessons that we never could attain elsewhere ... "Ah!" said Luther, "*affliction is the best book* in my library";<sup>74</sup> and let me add, *the best leaf in the book of affliction* is that blackest of all the leaves, the leaf called *heaviness*, when the spirit sinks within us ...'.<sup>75</sup>

Paul had concluded the section down to verse 7 by assuring the church (i) he had every confidence in the majority of them<sup>76</sup> (a point to which he will return several times later in the letter<sup>77</sup>), and (ii) he knew that, just as they shared in the same sufferings for Christ<sup>78</sup> as he did (although not so 'abundantly' as he<sup>79</sup>), so they would enjoy the same encouragement as he did.

## Verses 8-11.

But in verse 8, Paul switches from that which he knew about them, to that which he wanted them to know about him.

But to exactly which of his experiences Paul refers in verses 8 to 11 I really do not know.<sup>80</sup> What I *do* know is that for the greater part of his Christian life this remarkable man not only faced *adversity* and *adversaries*, but that *he could see death constantly staring him in the face*.

The story is the same whether:

(i) we tune in to his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus (the capital city of the Roman province of Asia<sup>81</sup>) and listen to his comments about the trials through which he passed as a result of the plotting of the Jews;<sup>82</sup>

(ii) we recall his words in his earlier epistle to the effect that he was constantly exposed to danger and *to death*, and that he had already had occasion to 'fight with wild beasts' (which I take to be a figurative reference to his conflict with extremely hostile and vicious human adversaries) at Ephesus, where, as he said later, he faced 'many adversaries';<sup>83</sup>

(iii) we note some of his expressions later in this very letter both about 'always being delivered to death for Jesus' sake',<sup>84</sup> and about the *deadly* perils to which he was frequently exposed;<sup>85</sup> or

(iv) we read the application he made to himself a short time later of the Old Testament text, 'For your sake we are *put to death* all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for slaughter'.<sup>86</sup>

Who knows, perhaps Priscilla and Aquila, who on one occasion hazarded their lives ('risked their very necks') for Paul,<sup>87</sup> did so during the dire, but undefined, episode referred to in verse 8, when the apostle saw himself at death's door.

As a generalisation, we could express the apostle's motto as, 'never distressed, never despairing, never deserted and never destroyed'.<sup>88</sup> Never despairing', did I say? And yet here was at least one exception. The apostle's affliction in Asia (whenever and whatever it was) caused him, he says himself, *to despair 'even of life itself'*.<sup>89</sup> Such an experience must have been grim in the extreme!<sup>90</sup>

And I note that, among others,<sup>91</sup> the Jewish historian Josephus uses the very word we here translate 'sentence' to indicate a decision (a verdict) of the Roman senate.<sup>92</sup> And indeed, there is an inscription dated<sup>93</sup> just a few years before Paul wrote this letter which reports a 'decision' reached by the then Emperor, Claudius.<sup>94</sup>

Some have suggested therefore that the apostle is here saying that he had seen himself as a man condemned to die, and had mentally lodged an appeal, only to receive 'the answer' ('the decision') that his petition had been rejected, and that he must die. And I note that the Revised Version, in line with this suggestion, renders verse 9, 'we ourselves have had *the answer* of death *within ourselves*'. And I take this to mean that, when asking himself what were his future prospects, the only answer he could give himself was 'death'.

But, in whichever way we interpret the word Paul used, it is clear that, humanly speaking, he saw no hope of acquittal or of further appeal ... he was doomed to die.

However, looking back on that time, the apostle *now* realised that it was God who had brought him down to rock bottom, and that He had done this that *He might wean Paul away from confidence in himself to confidence in Him alone*. And one likely evidence of the success of the Lord's procedure is the apostle's acknowledgement a little later: '*Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God*'.<sup>95</sup>

And it is the God, Paul was confident, 'who *delivered* us from so great a death ... who *will deliver* us'.<sup>96</sup> This, surely, is *the reasoning of faith*, that the God who has *proved Himself to us in the past* can surely be *trusted with our future*. For what God has done for us *before*, He is able to do for us *again*.<sup>97</sup>

It was the very same 'reasoning of faith' which, a thousand years before, had inspired young David to engage the formidable Philistine champion in battle.

Keeping in mind Paul's words here, listen to David's words to Saul when Saul attempted to talk him out of fighting Goliath by arguing that the son of Jesse was too young and inexperienced; 'and David said, "The Lord who *delivered* me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear *will deliver* me from the hand<sup>98</sup> of this Philistine'.<sup>99</sup> David was convinced that what God *had done* in the wilderness of Judah, He *could do* in the valley of Elah! That, I say again, is the 'reasoning of faith'.

And many of us have much to learn from both David and Paul. There can be no doubt that our own past experiences of God's *proven* goodness, faithfulness and provision *should* inform and sustain our faith both in the present and for the future. Yes, but, alas, often they *don't!* Do we not each need to pray with Louisa Stead:

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!  
*How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!*  
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!  
*O for grace to trust Him more!*<sup>100</sup>

But I cannot help contrasting Paul's past experience which he reports *here* (of being delivered from what he describes as 'so great a death') with his past experience which he reports in *chapter 12* – with the painful experience of his 'thorn in the flesh', from which, in spite of repeated prayer, he was most certainly *not* delivered.<sup>101</sup>

And this contrast pinpoints another lesson in spiritual life which I have to learn; namely, that, however much I may pray about some issue or problem, in the final analysis I must leave it to the Lord to decide *when* to bring me *out* of the trial and *when* to sustain me *through* it. Because, whether I like it or not, the Lord knows best, and He reserves to Himself the right to make that decision.

In theory at least, I know that the all-wise Lord has my best interests at heart, and that He knows how much I can bear.<sup>102</sup> I have many times enjoyed the insightful comment of Mr Wiersbe, 'When God puts His children into the furnace, He keeps *His hand* on the *thermostat* and *His eye* on the *thermometer*'.<sup>103</sup> Surely then I should trust *Him* to decide what is best in any given circumstance.

At the close of verse 10, the apostle expresses his confidence that God *would* continue to deliver him.<sup>104</sup> But in the same breath he encourages the Corinthians to work together both with him and with God in making intercession for him, and this to the end that, in due time, they will be able to offer *their* thanksgiving to God for *his* deliverance.<sup>105</sup>

So, if *Paul* is able to minister to *their* needs, by way of words of *personal encouragement*,<sup>106</sup> *they* are able to minister to *his* needs by way of words of *prayerful intercession*.<sup>107</sup>

'You also helping together by prayer for us', are his words, where the expression, 'helping together', translates a word which carries the idea of 'working under and alongside'.<sup>108</sup>

Later in the chapter, he uses a *similar* word when he speaks of *himself* as 'working *with them*'. But the word *here* adds the idea of some burden or pressure '*under*' *which* the work is being done. The vivid picture here is therefore that of someone labouring under a great burden, when others come alongside to share the toil and the load with him.

What a thought then we have here. That, when some believer somewhere is labouring under some great pressure and load, others come underneath alongside to share his burden. And they achieve this, Paul insists, by prayer!

I think it's correct to say that, in no less than seven of his letters which we possess, the apostle confesses his own need for personal prayer support. He clearly set *great* store by the power of intercessory prayer.<sup>109</sup> For he knew that God acts and works<sup>110</sup> *through* the prayers of His people<sup>111</sup> ... that *their prayers are God's way of getting His work done*. For this reason, Paul valued the prayer fellowship of other saints very highly indeed.

And the projected outcome? What would be the result? That many would have occasion to thank the Lord with upturned faces (as the Greek word suggests) on account of 'the gift' ('the favour', the deliverance, that is) granted to Paul in response to their prayers. And we can hardly miss that '*many*' would give thanks because '*many*' had prayed.

I can hardly imagine a greater stimulus to pray for others (whether those we label 'God's servants', or not – and whether overseas, or not) than the knowledge that we can really help *share their load* at the time, and that we may well be able to *share their rejoicing* when our prayers for them are answered.

## **Verses 12-20.**

As I said at the outset, time constraints mean that we will need to bypass the section from verse 12 to verse 20, in which the apostle maintains both *his own* trustworthiness in relation to his recently changed travel plans, and *his God's* trustworthiness in relation to His gospel and to His many promises.

## Verses 21-22.

And so to verses 21 and 22, which indicate that the God who is faithful to His *promises* is faithful also to His *people* – both (i) to Paul and his associates,<sup>112</sup> and (ii) to the Corinthians.<sup>113</sup> And in these verses Paul brings together four great blessings, all brought to us by the Triune God.<sup>114</sup>

First, in Christ, God has 'established' us, the word being a technical term for a legal guarantee.<sup>115</sup> That is, our security 'in Christ' is, as it were, legally safe-guarded by God Himself.<sup>116</sup>

Second, the God who, in Old Testament days, authorised the anointing of nobody other than prophets,<sup>117</sup> priests<sup>118</sup> and kings,<sup>119</sup> has 'anointed *us*', thereby setting us apart and equipping us to serve Him.<sup>120</sup>

Thirdly, God has marked us out as His own possession by stamping us with the seal<sup>121</sup> of the indwelling Holy Spirit.<sup>122</sup>

And, fourthly and finally, God has given us that same indwelling Holy Spirit as the part payment (the 'earnest, the 'first instalment', as the word indicates, 'of a payment made as a guarantee that the rest is sure to follow') of our future glorious and eternally secure inheritance.<sup>123</sup>

And linking together the two 'Holy Spirit' blessings we find in verse 22 reminds me of something I read many, many years ago. I quote: 'The **sealing** of the Spirit is, I know that I am God's property. The **earnest** of the Spirit is that I have got property'.<sup>124</sup>

It is truly a wonderful thought that the 'sealing' of the Holy Spirit teaches us that *we are possessed*, and the advance payment' (the 'earnest') of the Spirit teaches us that *we have possessions*.

What an incredibly privileged people we are!

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The English word 'eulogy' is derived from the Greek word ('Εὐλογέω').
- <sup>2</sup> 'The God who gives every possible encouragement'. *The New Jerusalem Bible*.
- <sup>3</sup> 'To the same extent'.
- <sup>4</sup> Because of the encouragement which God provides, Christians are able not only to endure their troubles, but also to rejoice in them, 2 Cor. 12. 10; James 1. 2-3.  
'Paul sets up a balance sheet. The expression "share abundantly" ['abound'] renders the term *perisseuō*, part of a family of words that is commonly used in commercial contexts to express profit or surplus. In effect, Paul images two columns. In the one column, headed "Sufferings for Christ", he enters the sufferings that he has experienced on behalf of Christ (cf. v. 6). The addition line shows a surplus. That is, they are almost unbearable. But the other column reads "Consolation" and also shows a surplus. For the same Christ who is ultimately responsible for Paul's sufferings provides generous consolation. And because Paul has more consolation than he needs for himself, he can be a source of consolation to others', F. W. Danker, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: 2 Corinthians*, on 2 Cor. 1. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> 'In the interests of'.
- <sup>6</sup> 'Weighed down, like an overloaded ship', C. K. Barrett, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, page 64.
- <sup>7</sup> Literally, 'that we were weighed down exceedingly beyond our power'.
- <sup>8</sup> As Heb. 2. 3.
- <sup>9</sup> 'We hope' ('ηλπικαμεν').
- <sup>10</sup> 'Many' is literally 'many faces'. This provides us with an attractive picture of many radiant faces turned upward toward heaven offering thanks to God for His answers to the united prayers of Paul and themselves.
- <sup>11</sup> J. B. Lightfoot's paraphrase is: 'Blessed is God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the compassionate Father (the Father who bestows mercies) of all comfort, He that comforts us in all our tribulation to the end that we may be able to comfort you who are involved in every tribulation and the comfort wherewith we are comforted ourselves of God; for as the sufferings of Christ befall us abundantly, so through Christ's agency does our consolation also abound. So on the one hand whether we undergo tribulation it is for your comfort and salvation who works in your patient enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer (and our hope of you that will so steadfastly endure, is unshaken) or whether on the other hand we are consoled here again it is for your comfort and salvation, for you know that as you share our sufferings with us, so you will also share our comfort. I speak of our sufferings for we would not have you ignorant, neither about the tribulation which befell us in Asia, how that beyond measure and beyond our powers (of endurance) we were oppressed, so that we utterly despaired even of life, but (this was not without a good purpose for) we have had the answer of death in ourselves (in our own hearts) that we may not place our confidence in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a death and is delivering us (*ρύσεται*) on whom we have rested our hopes that he will still deliver us, while you too deliver your joint aid on our behalf in your supplication that so for the gift bestowed on us by the intercession of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf', *The Epistles of 2 Corinthians and 1 Peter*, edited by Ben Witherington III and T. D. Still.
- <sup>12</sup> His apostolic authority was under fire at Corinth.
- <sup>13</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 2, 3, 4, 6(2), 7.
- <sup>14</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 4 (3), 6.
- <sup>15</sup> The verb (*parakaleō*) occurs 18 times and the corresponding noun 11 times.
- <sup>16</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 3-7.
- <sup>17</sup> 2 Cor. 13. 11.
- <sup>18</sup> Including: to beseech, comfort, console, desire, encourage, entreat, and exhort.
- <sup>19</sup> For example, 1 Thess. 4. 18.

<sup>20</sup> See Albert McShane, *'What the Bible Teaches: 2 Corinthians'*, page 256, footnote 3.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Cor. 2. 12-13; 7. 5-7. ('But He who encourages those that are (brought) low, (even) God, encouraged us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but also through the encouragement with which he was encouraged as to you; relating to us your ardent desire, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I the more rejoiced')

<sup>22</sup> "*Parakaleo*" is used of exhorting troops who are about to go into battle. Aeschylus (Persae 380) says of the ships sailing into battle; "The long galleys encouraged each other, line by line". Euripides (Phoenissae 1254) describing the plans for battle says: "So did they hail them, encouraging them to fight". Xenophon uses it of urging the soldiers to embark upon the ships and to set out on an adventurous voyage (Anabasis 5.6. 19). Polybius uses it of Lutatius addressing his troops before a naval battle with the Carthaginians (1.60.5). He also uses it of Demetrius rallying his men and addressing the ranks before they embarked upon battle (3.19.40) ... Again and again we find that "*parakaleo*" is the word of the rallying-call; it is the word used of the speeches of leaders and of soldiers who urge each other on', William Barclay, *'New Testament Words'*, pages 220-221.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Sam. 22. 47; 1 Kings 5. 7; Dan 3. 28.

<sup>24</sup> '... the first of the nineteen synagogue benedictions, which arose in the New Testament era: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God and God of our fathers ..."', Paul Barnett, *'The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians'*, page 67.

<sup>25</sup> 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *has* blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ; even as He *has* chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world ... *having* predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself', Eph. 1. 3-5.

<sup>26</sup> 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... has begotten us again to a living *hope* ... to an *incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance, reserved in the heavens for you*', 1 Pet. 1. 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all encouragement, who *encourages* us in all our affliction'.

<sup>28</sup> 2 Cor. 4. 8-9 ('We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed'); 7. 5 ('For indeed, when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way; outside were fightings, inside were fears').

<sup>29</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 8.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Cor. 2. 4.

<sup>31</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 4, 6; 2. 4.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Cor. 1. 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 4.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 10.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 4-7.

<sup>36</sup> 'God is the "Father of mercies" in two senses. He is their source; all mercies we enjoy come from Him. Moreover He is the Father characterized by mercy, the merciful Father. The Greek construction permits both senses, and Paul probably intended both', Thomas Constable, Expository Notes, on 2 Cor. 1. 3. It may be patterned on the prayer of the synagogue. "O our Father, merciful Father" (אב הרחמים, *āb hārāḡāmīm*), which introduces the Jewish confession of Israel's faith, the Shema.

<sup>37</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Eph. 1. 17.

<sup>39</sup> James 1. 17. Cf. also Heb. 12. 9.

<sup>40</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Gen. 4. 21 ('Jubal ... was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe') and John 8. 44 ('the devil ... is a liar and the father of lies').

<sup>42</sup> This 'designation is a common one in Judaism', R. Bultman, *'Theological Dictionary of the New Testament'*, volume V, page 161.



<sup>43</sup> W. E. Vine, 'An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words', article 'Merciful' C.2.

<sup>44</sup> Psalm 50 (51). 1 (Greek Old Testament). 'A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, when he had gone to Bathsheba ... according to the multitude of your compassions blot out my transgression'.

<sup>45</sup> Rom. 15. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Rom. 15. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Rom. 15. 33; 16. 20; Phil. 4. 9; 1 Thess. 5. 23.

<sup>48</sup> 2 Cor. 13. 11.

<sup>49</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 3.

<sup>50</sup> 1 Pet. 5. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Based on Harry Ironside's comment: 'There are two things of which God is said to have the monopoly: He is 'the God of all grace' and He is 'the God of all comfort'. All grace comes from Him, all lasting comfort comes from Him". 'Addresses on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians', page 17.

<sup>52</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 4-7.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. 2 Cor. 12. 7-10. Compare also Dan 3. 17-18: which can be paraphrased as, 'We declare that God *can*; we believe that He *will*; we recognise He *might not*, we pray that He *does* ... but, in any case, we're not bowing!'

<sup>54</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 8-11.

<sup>55</sup> 'In *any* affliction', 2 Cor. 1. 4.

<sup>56</sup> 'The *same* sufferings', 2 Cor. 1. 6.

<sup>57</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 4, 6.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Lord comforts us, not to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters', John Henry Jowett, 'The Silver Lining', page 124.

<sup>59</sup> 'The churches throughout the whole of Judaea and Galilee and Samaria ... walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied.' Acts 9. 31.

<sup>60</sup> 'Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope'. Rom. 15. 4.

<sup>61</sup> And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David ... and strengthened his hand in God (which I understand to mean that he 'encouraged him in God'), 1 Sam. 23. 16. In effect, Jonathan strengthened David by putting David's weak hand into God's almighty hand!

<sup>62</sup> Col. 4. 10-11.

<sup>63</sup> 2 Cor. 2. 13.

<sup>64</sup> '... and not only by his coming but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged by you', 2 Cor. 7.4-7. God encouraged Paul by the coming of Titus to Macedonia, just as Titus had previously been encouraged by the Corinthians. Paul in turn will encourage the Corinthians. Divine encouragement thus comes full circle, from the Corinthians, through Titus to Paul, and back to the Corinthians.

<sup>65</sup> What a tremendous boost they must have given to him and his service!

<sup>66</sup> Consider the supreme example; Heb. 2. 18; 4. 15.

Also consider:

(i) John Fawcett (1739-1817) 'lost his son Stephen to smallpox in 1774, his mother in 1782, and his daughter Sarah in 1785. These losses made Fawcett a more endearing pastor. In Fawcett, this "long-continued and heavy domestic affliction" brought about "the tenderest sympathy" towards those in his congregation who were also afflicted', Chris Fenner, *John Fawcett: Pastor, poet, patron, and friend*. Accessed at ....

<http://www.sbts.edu/resources/towers/john-fawcett-pastor-poet-patron-and-friend/>

(ii) Prometheus expresses a common complaint when he says to the chorus (*Aeschylus, Prometheus* 263–265):

'How light for those who feel no pain to give  
advice to those whose life is weal and woe'.

With related strains in *Sophocles' Trachiniai* (729–730), Deianira chides the chorus:

'Such things no partner in grief would say,  
but one who knows at home no bane'.

(iii) Shakespeare (*Much Ado about Nothing*, act V, scene 1) echoed the sentiment:

'Let no comforter delight mine ear but such a one whose wrongs do suit with mine'.

(iv) Epictetus (Diss. III. 23.8) and Seneca (Cons. ad Polyb. 15.5) state the principle that in human experience sufferers can aid those in like circumstances to their own.

<sup>67</sup> *Spurgeon: An All Round Ministry*, pages 221–222.

<sup>68</sup> Their 'salvation', 2 Cor. 1. 6. Cf. the general and wide sense given to the word 'salvation' in Phil. 1. 19.

<sup>69</sup> He could see no way out, no way of escape; nothing but death awaited him. Think of Naomi, who was totally despondent, Ruth 1. 21, saying in effect with Job; 'my eye will never again see good', Job 7. 7. But Job did, and so did she. Compare David's 'I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul', 1 Sam. 27. 1 – which he certainly did not, any more than Paul's life was cut short in Asia.

<sup>70</sup> The description of God as one 'who raises the dead' (see Deut. 32. 39; 1 Sam. 2. 6, LXX) is drawn from a well-attested understanding of God's power in the Jewish liturgy. The second prayer in the Eighteen Benedictions runs: 'Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever; thou makest the dead to live'. Cf. Rom. 4. 17.

<sup>71</sup> From the second verse of her poem, 'He giveth more grace':

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

<sup>72</sup> Orphaned when young, for most of her life she suffered crippling affliction from severe arthritis.

<sup>73</sup> See ... <http://grammarist.com/usage/to-a-t/>

<sup>74</sup> 'It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity ... I am afraid that all the grace that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable... Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library', C H Spurgeon, quoted in Darrel W. Amundsen, *The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon*, Christian History, Issue 29, Volume X, No. 1, 25. Accessed at ...

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1991/issue29/2922.html?start=4>, and <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1991/issue29/2922.html?start=5>.

<sup>75</sup> *The Christian's Heaviness and Rejoicing*, preached on 7 November 1858 at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

<sup>76</sup> The word translated 'firmly grounded' is a common commercial term, signifying secure; cf. Rom. 4. 16. See C. K. Barrett, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, page 63.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 2. 3; 7. 16; 8. 22.

<sup>78</sup> In view of his comments in 2 Cor. 4. 10–12, it is likely that the apostle has in mind the sufferings which befell him because of his proclamation concerning the Lord Jesus (cf. Col. 1. 24); sufferings, that is, on account of his association with Him.

<sup>79</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Tertullian provides us with the earliest comment on this verse of which I know; and he claimed that Paul in this passage referred to his fighting wild beasts at Ephesus, stating that Paul 'enumerated it to induce an unfaltering belief in the resurrection of the flesh'. (*'On the resurrection of the flesh'*, 48) Paul had already mentioned that episode (whatever it was) in the first epistle (1 Cor. 15. 32).

<sup>81</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 8; that which is now western Turkey.

<sup>82</sup> Acts 20. 19.

<sup>83</sup> 1 Cor. 15. 30-32. I suspect that the reference to fighting with wild beasts in verse 32a is figurative – in much the same way as he later wrote to Timothy about being 'delivered out of the mouth of the lion', 2 Tim. 4. 17, which I understand to be a veiled reference to Emperor Nero.

It is interesting that Heraclitus, an earlier Greek writer from Ephesus, had spoken of his fellow-citizens as 'wild beasts'. More generally, the Greeks used the term 'wild beasts' to describe a violent, fierce mob. And it was probably very shortly after dictating these words that two of his friends, Gaius and Aristarchus, were almost pulled to pieces by a mob, Acts 19. 29. No doubt, Paul could see the storm already gathering, and ranked these 'wild beasts' among his many opponents – the 'adversaries' to whom he later refers, 1 Cor. 16. 9.

<sup>84</sup> 2 Cor. 4. 11.

<sup>85</sup> 2 Cor. 11. 23.

<sup>86</sup> Rom. 8. 35-36.

<sup>87</sup> Rom. 16. 4.

<sup>88</sup> 'We are hemmed in on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed', 2 Cor. 4. 8-9. As far as the *first* expression is concerned, in Greek there is a beautiful paronomasia, which might, perhaps, be expressed in English by '*pressed, but not oppressed*'. Literally the words mean, 'being at a loss, but not utterly at a loss'. J. B. Phillips famously paraphrases the *last* expression, '... we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out!'

<sup>89</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 8.

<sup>90</sup> But, although the Apostle may despair of life, he does not despair of God.

<sup>91</sup> For example, Polybius, Xenophon, and Suidas.

<sup>92</sup> See especially, C. J. Hemer, 'A Note on 2 Corinthians 1. 9', *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972) 103-107 ... and for general information, see B. Palme, 'Roman Litigation' – accessed at ... [http://iowp.univie.ac.at/sites/default/files/IOWP\\_palme\\_litigation02.pdf](http://iowp.univie.ac.at/sites/default/files/IOWP_palme_litigation02.pdf).

'When they (Hyrcanus and his sons) desire an audience, they shall be introduced into the senate by the Dictator, or by the General of the Horse; and when they have introduced them, their *answers* (*ἀποκρίματα*) shall be returned them in ten days at the furthest, after the decree of the senate is made about their affairs', Flavius Josephus, '*Antiquities of the Jews*', Book 14, Chapter 10, Section 6.

<sup>93</sup> AD 51.

<sup>94</sup> More details can be found on page 104 of C. J. Hemer, *ibid*.

<sup>95</sup> 2 Cor. 3. 5.

<sup>96</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 10. And the apostle's confidence held out to the end of his days. In what was possibly his last letter, he wrote, 'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work', 2 Tim. 4.17-18.

<sup>97</sup> Compare the last two lines of Joseph Hart's short hymn, 'How good is the God we adore' ('Hymns Composed on Various Subjects', 1759) :

We'll praise Him for *all that is past*,  
And trust Him for *all that's to come*.

<sup>98</sup> The same Hebrew word as translated 'paw'.

<sup>99</sup> 1 Sam. 17. 37.

<sup>100</sup> Louisa M. R. Stead. For her moving story, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm3WTvDfMe4>.

<sup>101</sup> 2 Cor. 12. 7-10.

<sup>102</sup> 1 Cor. 10. 13.

<sup>103</sup> 'Be Encouraged', page 16.

<sup>104</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 10c,

<sup>105</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 11.

<sup>106</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 4, 6.

<sup>107</sup> 2 Cor. 1. 11.

<sup>108</sup> Or 'an underworker with'. The expression 'is the translation of a Greek word used only here in the New Testament: *synypourgounton*. It consists of three words meaning "with", "under", and "work". It paints a picture of labourers bowed down under some heavy burden that they are working hard together to lift', Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes*, on 2 Cor. 1. 3.

<sup>109</sup> We sometimes hear it said, 'All I can do is pray for him'; and I know what the speaker means. But in the end we can do *nothing better or more effective* than to pray.

<sup>110</sup> Phil. 1. 19; Philemon 22.

<sup>111</sup> 'The nations that are left round about you shall know that I the Lord have built the ruined places, and planted that which was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and *I will do it ... I will yet for this be inquired of* by the house of Israel, *to do it* for them', Ezek. 36. 36-37. Cf. Dan 9. 2, 16, 19.

<sup>112</sup> 'Us', 2 Cor. 1. 21.

<sup>113</sup> 'You', 2 Cor. 1. 21.

<sup>114</sup> 'Christ ... God ... Spirit'.

<sup>115</sup> 'βεβαίωσις is a legal and commercial term to designate properly and legally guaranteed security', Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, pages 104 ff; cf. Eldon Woodcock, *The Seal of the Holy Spirit*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):139-63, and Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, pages 107-108.

<sup>116</sup> It is 'legally indestructible', A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, page 40.

<sup>117</sup> Elisha, 1 Kings 19. 16.

<sup>118</sup> Aaron and his sons, Exod. 28. 41; 29. 7; 30. 30; 40. 13, 15.

<sup>119</sup> David, 1 Sam. 16. 12; Solomon, 1 Kings 1. 34; Hazael, 1 Kings 19. 15; Jehu, 1 Kings 19. 16; 2 Kings 9. 3, 6, 12.

<sup>120</sup> 'This anointing sets apart, commissions, and equips Christians to serve God', Ralph P. Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians*, page 28. Cf. 'You shall *anoint* Aaron and his sons, and *consecrate* them, that they may *serve me*', Exod. 30. 30.

<sup>121</sup> 'The seal in antiquity was an impression made on wax by a special instrument (also called a seal) to indicate the ownership of a document. We continue to attach the company seal to important legal documents', P. Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, page 41.

<sup>122</sup> 'Having believed, you were *sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*', Eph. 1. 13. See Eldon Woodcock, *The Seal of the Holy Spirit*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):139-63.

<sup>123</sup> 'The promised Holy Spirit, who is the earnest (the down-payment) of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession', Eph. 1. 13-14.

<sup>124</sup> J. B. Stoney, *Ministry, Volume 8. Part 2 - Notes on Scripture (1895)*, page 464.