

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

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Paul specifies that he and Timothy suffered persecution in the province of Asia, to the point where they thought they were going to die. But God delivered them from death. God will ultimately deliver all believers from death by resurrecting us. Paul thanks the Corinthians for praying for him.

Paul now goes on to give the Corinthian church some detail regarding the sufferings and afflictions he has endured, so he says, *For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia* (v 8).

Again, Paul is being open and vulnerable with the church at Corinth, even though what he is describing is perhaps not what they thought an “apostle” would go through. Paul, however, is bringing them into what he believes the life of the “apostle” is really about. It is about following in the example of Jesus, who learned obedience, even to death on the cross, and was therefore greatly exalted by His Father (Philippians 2:8-9).

Paul connects this with the calling he received from Jesus in Acts:

“Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (Acts 9:15-16)

For Paul, the calling to be an apostle was a calling to suffer for Christ, and he came to understand God’s overarching purpose as he states in Romans:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”
(Romans 8:18)

This is a similar statement to Paul’s assertion in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that the sufferings of believers for the sake of Christ endured while living on earth create an “eternal weight of glory.”

Although humans are lower than angels, God designed humanity to reign over the earth in harmony with Him, nature, and one another (Psalm 8:5-6). But we fell to temptation, and instead chose to pursue our own way, apart from God’s (good) design (Genesis 3:6).

Although Satan retook dominion due to our fall (John 12:31) God’s intent for humanity remains; God desires to silence Satan by having humans reign in the earth in harmony with Him (Psalm 8:2). Jesus restored the “glory and honor” bestowed upon humans to reign in the earth (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus was granted the “glory and honor” of having authority over the earth because of “the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9).

Because Jesus chose to become “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8-9) Jesus was given “all authority” that is “in heaven, and in on earth” (Matthew

28:18). Jesus invites all believers to follow in His path, and Paul desires all his disciples to understand this, that we are:

“...fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”
(Romans 8:17b)

To be a “fellow heir with Christ” is to share His reign. This is a reward for all believers who overcome temptation, rejection, and other suffering for His name, even as Jesus overcame (Revelation 3:21). The path to this great reward is to “suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

This is why suffering in Jesus’s name produces an “eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Paul believed that all who are “in Christ” are called to the same road of “suffering” and “affliction.” And Paul is not just teaching this, he is living it out. Which is why he gives testimony here to his *brethren*, his fellow believers in Corinth of the *affliction which came to us in Asia*. *Asia* here would refer to the Roman province of Asia, which was located in modern-day Turkey. At that time, the Roman province of *Asia* contained a number of Greek colonies that had become Roman cities.

Paul tells the Corinthians that while he was in Asia *That we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life* (v 8). While in *Asia*, Paul endured suffering that pushed him beyond human ability to bear it. Paul was not the only one, as here the pronouns *we* and *our* are used. Therefore, this would include others, presumably Timothy, who is cited as a coauthor (2 Corinthians 1:1).

Paul is conveying the reality of his own experience in suffering for the sake of Christ, which he now declares was *beyond our strength*. Since part of what he will do in this letter is to defend his apostleship, why would he give an example of himself enduring suffering that was *beyond our strength*? It is because walking by faith in the power of the Spirit is the key to walking as a faithful witness, enduring the sufferings of Christ, that we might also gain an “eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). It is this message Paul was appointed to preach, and to live. Walking in our own strength is not our calling. Our calling is to walk in the resurrection power of Jesus.

Paul is not asserting such suffering will be easier because of understanding its reward; Paul and Timothy’s experience led them to a place where *we despaired even of life*. There was a time, or times, when Paul thought he was on death’s door.

Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead (v 9). Paul reached a point where he stopped thinking about living life on earth, and starting trusting in being resurrected after dying.

It could be here that Paul was referring to an actual *sentence of death* that some authority put upon him, or a situation of suffering where he was on death’s doorstep. As we will see in Chapter 12, it is even possible that Paul actually died, then was brought back to life (2 Corinthians 12:1-6).

Paul knew he had already been spiritually placed into the death of Jesus. So he knew he could trust in *God who raises the dead*, even at the point of his physical death. Because Paul was in Christ, he knew he would also be resurrected. It appears he had reached at least one point in his life where his hope in the resurrection was all he had remaining, as he *despaired even of life*.

It is interesting that in the midst of speaking about his/their great trial, Paul elevates the main lesson he gained from this dire experience: *so that we would not trust in ourselves*. Facing death, being left with nothing but trust in the resurrection, led Paul and Timothy to shed their last vestiges of trust in themselves. Whatever illusion they had that “they had it under control” was now stripped away.

In speaking of his hardship, Paul does not ask for pity. He does not raise up himself as superior because of what he has gone through. In this letter Paul will defend his apostolic authority, but his mission is not to get people to trust in him – his appointment as an apostle is to lead people to trust in Christ. Paul was pressed beyond his human strength, *so that we would not trust in ourselves*, so it would stand to reason that God will use trials in any person’s life to lead them to learn that same lesson. This is consistent with God’s training of the second generation of Israel that came out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 8:3).

In this letter, Paul will exhort the Corinthians to also embrace the trial of rejection from the world, because it produces an “eternal weight of glory” when we stand before the judgment of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:17, 5:10).

Paul was not afraid to die—he trusted in the power of God to resurrect him. At the time of Paul’s travails in Asia, Jesus decided to spare his physical life: *who delivered us from so great a peril of death* (v 10). In this instance, God’s comfort came in the form of physical deliverance. But Paul expresses a future hope that transcends physical deliverance; God has already delivered, *and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope*. It is God upon whom *we have set our hope*. And our ultimate hope is God’s promise that He will resurrect us from death.

This resurrection from death Paul refers to has both a future as well as a present application. The future application is that believers will be raised to life and given a new body in a new earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 21:1).

The present application is that Jesus’s resurrection power delivers us from the power of sin to harm us when we walk by faith, trusting that His ways are for our best. All believers have the Spirit within, which gives them the power to walk in the Spirit; but it is a matter of each person’s choice (Galatians 6:8).

Each believer has inside them both a new creation, a born-again self (2 Corinthians 5:17) as well as an old self that is unredeemed (Romans 7:17-19).

As Paul wrote to the Roman church:

“How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”
(Romans 6:2-3)

It is not difficult for us to see that if we are facing death, we need outside help. And that help is the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The “God of all comfort” has given us the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (“paracletos”) to be our Helper, Comforter, and Advocate.

Jesus says in the Gospel of John:

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”
(John 3:6).

Our new man, that is born of the Spirit, has the indwelling power of God’s Spirit, and so has the power to overcome sin in our daily walk.

Paul states later in this letter:

“that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”
(2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Paul is declaring a way of life of not trusting in our flesh, but to be guided by the One whom God has given us, the Comforter—the Holy Spirit.

When Paul faces despair, the comfort he receives is grounded in *God who raises the dead*. In the context of the resurrection power of Christ, we can have “patient enduring of the same sufferings” (2 Corinthians 1:6). Paul’s comfort is grounded in the future hope that God will turn these sufferings into an “eternal weight of glory” that is a great reward for faithful obedience (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Inherent in such deliverance is to be delivered from the evil one (Matthew 6:13). Our hope in a future, incredible benefit is based on faith that God *will deliver us* from living a life of futility. This deliverance transcends mere physical deliverance. The greatest physical peril is death, but a far greater peril is living a life that does not count for anything, a life without purpose and meaning. By faith Paul knows that God will reward all obedience and suffering for Him, and *deliver us* from futility.

Paul knows his hope is “being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). This passage in Philippians also speaks of a great reward for faithful obedience. The object of this faith is God; *He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us*. God’s deliverance transcends physical life.

Death cannot hold us! We will be delivered. Jesus has already defeated death, having been resurrected. And ultimately, death itself will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). Every believer is promised they will be resurrected and given a new body as well (1 Corinthians 15:22–23).

In 2 Timothy, Paul comes to know that he will suffer a martyr’s death and is fully prepared to die (2 Timothy 4:6). But at this point, at the time of Paul’s writing of this letter to Corinth, God had more for Paul/others to do. So he/they were *delivered* from being martyred at that time.

Paul credits the Corinthian church for playing a role in his physical deliverance, noting *You also joining in helping us through your prayers* (v 11). The point here seems to be that Paul credits the intercessory prayer of the Corinthians as playing an important role in his physical deliverance from evil. The verb *joining* indicates that Paul is also asking them to continue with him in prayer. Jesus included in His model prayer a petition to be delivered from evil (Matthew 6:13). In this case, God chose to answer that prayer through a physical deliverance.

As Paul has opened his heart to the church at Corinth, he now encourages them to continue to partner with him in prayer. Paul is aware of how the prayers of God's people are helping him to fulfill the mission of Christ, having experienced it personally.

In the same way, he will be praying for them, that they may join him in this mission "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself"(2 Corinthians 5:19).

So that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many (v 11).

The Greek word translated *favor* in verse 11 is "charisma" which is most often translated "gift." Paul expresses that it was a great gift or favor to he and his team (*us*) to receive the prayers of the *many persons* in Corinth, and elsewhere. The prayers are running both ways, with Paul and Timothy also praying for them. This spiritual teamwork is an example of how believers ought to work together in prayer. Paul and Timothy are aware of and are grateful that *many persons* pray on their behalf. Their response is to give *thanks* to God for these intercessory petitions.

Biblical Text

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; 9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; 10 who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, 11 you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.