

RE: THIS LETTER :: Undisputedly recognized as a writing Paul is the author, there is scholarly debate over whether 2 Corinthians was originally one letter or is composed of two or more smaller letters. Evidence for this includes several references, within the letter, to other letters written for the church in Corinth (see 1 Cor 5:9; the "letter of tears" referenced 2 Cor 2:3–4 and 7:8 and the abrupt change of tone from being previously harmonious to bitterly reproachful in 2 Corinthians 10–13 has led many to speculate that chapters 10–13 form part of the "letter of tears" which were in some way tagged on to Paul's main letter. While this may or may not be of importance in understanding his teaching, scholars believe that the letter(s) of 2 Corinthians was most likely written during the 3 years Paul spent in Ephesus (Acts 19:8, 19:10, 20:31) (Roughly from AD 53 to 57). after his initial visit to Corinth, where he stayed for about 18 months, recorded in Acts 18:11. In the letter Paul is concerned with the boundaries of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, whether one comes from a Jewish or Gentile background.

consolation :: the word is key in our selection, used 10 times. The Greek word used here παρακαλέω [parakaleō] is rich in meaning as it evolved over used in Greek literature and culture and then through Biblical use, both Jewish and Christian. It can mean: (1) to call, or send for, summon, invite, (2) to beseech, entreat, beg ..in prayer or in person, to God or people; (3) to exhort, admonish, to encourage; the Greeks commonly used it when a superior exhorted soldiers to action, Christians used it for representation the proclamation of the gospel (4) to comfort, encourage, console, especially in times of grief.

The curious thing to note is the different way in which we now understand consolation today versus how it was understood in the pre-Christian world of Antiquity. Then comforting/consoling was encouraging the one in pain to be silent, to not cry and mourn, which was a sort of dishonoring of ones self. Pain and grief showed the limit to how far man's insights and resources can take him. The Emperor Julian said "everything is transitory." In that line of thought all mourning is foolish and useless. This is because in the Ancient World there is a bottom a profound lack of comfort or hope. The dead were called "blessed" because they no longer had to suffering the affliction of human life, whether they were assumed to have a new life after death, an eternal sleep or suffered total annihilation.

The Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth turns this notion upside down: death is not merely the end, the return of the immortal soul to its pure place of origin, an escape from the transitory pain of earthly life. Rather this life has meaning because of the hope that is given to us in, by and through Jesus the Christ. In this way to console others in their suffering and the exhortation or proclamation of the gospel are two sides of the same coin. Life *here* matters.

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

New Revised Standard Version | (NRSV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all **consolation**,

⁴ who **console** us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to **console** those who are in any affliction with the **consolation** with which we ourselves are **consolated** by God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our **consolation** is abundant through Christ. ⁶ If we are being afflicted, it is for your **consolation** and salvation; if we are being **consolated**, it is for your **consolation**, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. ⁷ *Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our **consolation**.*

⁸ We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of **the affliction we experienced in Asia**; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received **THE SENTENCE OF DEATH** so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set *our hope* that he will rescue us again, ¹¹ as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Hope:: the two times this word point to the hope in a God that consoles us (Psalm 22:4; 70:21; 85:17; 93:19; Isaiah 54:11; 57:18) and that given and realized in the death & resurrection of Jesus.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH :: this is challenging to understand. Scholars believe it points to the “thorn in his flesh” talked about by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7.

the affliction we experienced in Asia :: Paul is most likely referring to challenges he experienced in Ephesus (then Asia meant what we now call Turkey & Syria). It could refer to the conflict he had with others preaching a more Jewish form of following Jesus, undermining & subverting Paul’s missionary efforts. It could also refer to the political challenges he experienced in his spiritual activism which led some to forsake the idolatry of Greek pagan gods which was at the center of many local economies, such as Ephesus, which was a spiritual center for Greek worship. See the tumult around the conversion of Demetrius, the shrine maker for the god Artemis, recorded in Acts 19:24-41.

AS YOU READ AND REFLECT ON THIS TEXT:

- 🔓 How have you experienced affliction, suffering and grief in your life?
- 🔓 In some of those toughest times who or how were you consoled in your grief and pain?
- 🔓 How or who acted so as to bridge your experience of “earthly” consolation to “spiritual” or divine consolation?
- 🔓 How do you need the Spirit of God to console, comfort or encourage you today?
- 🔓 Who might the Spirit of God be calling you to console, comfort or encourage today?