

2 Corinthians 1

Written by K B Napier

Monday, 26 December 2016 20:33

“... a record upon my soul...”

We tend to live as we wish, ignoring so many godly ways and truths, in order to enjoy the life we have constructed for ourselves or our families, free of constraint. But, Paul says in this text that he calls on God to be a record upon his soul.

If we really believed in God, would we not be afraid of what we do daily? If God is a record of everything we say and do, should we not be far more circumspect and try to live as He would want us to live? Instead, most of us live as though God did not exist! We do whatever we want to do, putting a slim skin of holiness on the top, mainly to fool others, but also to fool ourselves. Under it all, we sin and call it ‘good’.

The Holy Spirit lives within each one who is saved. He guides the soul toward holiness, but the ‘old man’ prefers sin and tries to prevent us from attaining the goal of godliness – and is remarkably successful, thanks to our propensity for sin and the prompting of Satan at our heels!

And the younger a Christian is, the more invincible he thinks he is. He might reject the elders and wish only to do what *he* thinks is right, regardless of wise counsel. Many young Christians fall and stumble at this standard; they ignore elders even though scripture tells them to listen and obey. They hotly pursue their own agenda, sinning as they go, but believing (wrongly) that they do good. And they insist they know what they are doing!

I tell you, it is far better for a young Christian to fail because of poor but well-intended counsel by an elder, than for him to always rush onward in his own strength without listening to a word given in season. Why? Because the elder is more likely to be right more times than he may be wrong! But, the young Christian can rush in where angels fear to tread, simply because he/she allows their heart to rule their head *and* spirit.

In reality, of course, both elder and youngster will listen to *each other*. Where scripture is plain on an issue, each must obey. In particular, the young Christian who ignores the scriptural counsel of an elder is guilty of sin, no matter how ‘right’ he thinks he is in his hot-headedness. The elders are there to protect and counsel those who are younger in age and faith. They can be ignored at the peril of the younger ones, whose actions will surely bring God’s anger upon their own heads.

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The same can be said of more mature Christians. All must submit to the authority of the elders

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. Today, too many Christians go their own way and argue against elders who have proved their scriptural integrity. Or, they agree when in the presence of the elders, but go on to do their own thing when alone. Thus, they are not in unity but are disharmonious. Though they may not show lack of harmony when in their churches, their hidden disagreement is a source of disunity under God.

The true elder can call upon God to be the record of his soul. Can you? The elder is ordained by God to his office and others are to submit to his scriptural authority, not act as they wish.

Younger Christians must be listened to, but their words and thoughts have no support if they are against scripture, and an elder counsels this. This is behind Paul's words in this chapter and we ought to take heed.

Verses 1&2

1.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia.

2.

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In this Epistle, too, Paul is emphasising that he is an apostle ordained by God to his office, by God's own plan and purpose. He sends his greetings, and the greetings of his younger co-worker, Timothy, to the church at Corinth as well as to all the Christians in Achaia ('trouble' – comprising Greece, its islands, and Macedonia, a very large area). This might denote that Corinth was the major church of the whole country, but we cannot be sure.

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Paul is wishing them God's benefits and favours, and harmony, from the Father and the Son. So, again, we find Paul sending merciful and loving messages to a Christian church with much at fault. As we said when studying the First Epistle, this should be our own pattern, when we have to rebuke brethren.

Verses 3-6

1.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

2.

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

3.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

4.

And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation."

In this section Paul equates any suffering the Corinthians experience with their own, as apostles. They are equal in these things, so each can sympathise with the other. The One Who keeps them all is God (as Trinity), the Father of the Messiah having particular mention in this text. He is Father of the Christ and of mercies and all comfort: ***oiktirmos***, a heart full of compassion with works that prove it; and comfort,

paraklesis

, encouragement, solace, and refreshment.

We often forget that God refreshes, usually when we enter a period of suffering. We forget because we tend to concentrate on our suffering and on the problem, rather than on the Father,

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Who promises us comfort and blessings if we hand our problems over to Him. He comforts us “in all our tribulation”, *thlipsis*, great affliction, persecution, pressure upon us or even oppression, bringing much distress.

We should remember that Satan wishes us harm, and so will oppress us with many afflictions and distressful situations, that we will falter and fall with depression or neglect of what is really important. God wishes to give us comfort and help, if only we will give all our problems over to Him. Trust in Him and He will give us not just comfort, but also an answer. This is because He has promised us, and also because He is allowing Satan to do his worse, that we might be tested and found strong, becoming even stronger through the affliction.

With the testing comes the opportunity to escape its results, but we often succumb to temptation to fail. Depression is one such failure that robs us of all godly experience worth having, including rejection of temptation to fail, and knowledge of God’s glory in our souls when we are triumphant over sin through the Holy Spirit. (Never think depression is a way of life from God!).

He *will* comfort us in all tribulation – this is His promise to all who are faithful. And when we are comforted and know God’s hand in our lives we are able to pass this blessing on to others. We can do so because we have ourselves experienced troubles, and freedom from them in Christ. We are unable to do this if we remain in our sin and afflictions because we fail to ask God to take them on His own shoulders.

That is why people with depression are unable to help themselves, let alone others. Self-help groups merely compound the problem by concentrating on the troubles rather than on the solution. They are resigned to their sins and results and so never see what God has for them in reality. Satan has locked them into their own misery and they accept it as some kind of penance or even as God’s will, ignoring the fact that God cannot sustain people in sin. By accepting depression as God’s will, people reject God and His mercies, and attribute sin to Him. This cannot be the case for Christians, who must rigorously cast out any notion of depression.

The sufferings of Christ abounded in the apostles (verse 5). The sufferings, *pathema*, are the consequences of the sins of others, causing them to inflict evil upon everyone, physically, mentally and spiritually. We should note that *pathema* are ongoing, not one-off. In many Christian quarters today we find an unreal promise made by leaders, who say that once we turn to God, he will give us rest from affliction.

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If anything, the reverse is true. When we accept that affliction is our lot, we will begin on the path of wisdom and peace. And when we face and accept this truth, God will give us great strength, beyond anything we can manufacture humanly. In other words, the suffering of Christ is countered by His consolation, or, comfort and refreshment. We *cannot* experience God's refreshment and comfort unless we face and go through affliction. This means that we grow strong as Believers and know true joy, only when we know trouble in our lives. This is because until we know real trouble, we cannot be tested and discover our 'weakest link', which we can then give to God to deal with. Our 'weakest link' should also be our strongest!

In practical terms, when we encounter troubles, we must not fall in a heap, cry, shake or become depressed. If we do that we are no better than the heathen and our witness fails. If we give God our troubles and ask him to deal with them, He will give a strength unknown to us before. We will shine forth as examples of His grace and mercy, and this will help others who need comfort.

Our troubles, then, lead to comfort by God and also to our salvation. This **soteria** is not eternal salvation, but must be interpreted as deliverance from our troubles and from our enemies. Thus, the very thing that gives us trouble is the way of our deliverance from it!

(We know it cannot mean eternal salvation, because Paul is talking to people who are already saved. Therefore, one of the word's other meanings must apply).

How can this be? How can our troubles also bring us deliverance? Think of a physical malady. The pain will drive us to see our doctor, who might refer us to a surgeon. He will remove the part giving us pain and we will be restored to good health, stronger than when we had the malady. That is, when we work through the pain of our trouble, it is dealt with and we become stronger than before. The same goes for spiritual troubles.

This promised deliverance is 'effectual', **energeo**, operative and powerful, bringing good results, in *all* our problems, says Paul. The deliverance is not a wish but a reality. It is always effectual – it works! It gives us patience, **hupomone**

, and hope and we remain faithful through all trials. None of us can claim uniqueness, for Paul and Christ have all suffered, to the extreme. And if Paul and the apostles are comforted, knowing God's release from the pain of their sufferings, then this is passed on to the

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Corinthians who will also know comfort and deliverance.

Verses 7-11

1.

“And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

2.

For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

3.

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

4.

Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

5.

Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.”

The Corinthians who suffer as did the apostles, will also know deliverance and peace (verse 7). This is their promise, not a supposition or wish. Do you truly believe this? Or, do you think your suffering is unique and will never end? If we feel hard-done-by and woeful then we will not see or know God's comfort.

But, if we recognise our suffering is nothing like the suffering of Christ, or even of Paul, then we will face it and work through it with great honour and might, overcoming it in the strength of God.

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Give the situation over to Him and He will shoulder the burden and deal with it. All we must do is be resolute and firm in our faith, not giving in to Satan's constant sharp attacks of misery.

Paul does not pull his punches. He tells the Corinthians, who mainly are well-off and in comfort, exactly what he and his co-workers are suffering, because they will one day know the same afflictions. Paul says his hope or expectation of their successful dealing with suffering is solid. He has every confidence they will remain steadfast, **bebaios**, sure, firm, stable in their faith.

Paul knew their weaknesses, but he also knew that if they applied their faith in God, they would know immense divine victory over their circumstances. As they experienced the same sufferings as Paul, so they would also experience the same victory through Christ Jesus. Is this your expectation, too? Or, do you give in to depression and lack of trust in God?

In Asia, Paul and his co-workers knew much trouble, including privation, beatings, torture and hatred. They were "pressed out of measure", **bareo**, weighed down by violence and stern circumstances, **barus**. So much so that the troubles were **huperb ole**, exceeding what is usual and going beyond anything expected. Such was their suffering, that it stretched their **dunamis** or strength past its point of no return. What they suffered was so bad, they "despaired even of life"... they were **exaporeomai**, totally destitute and at a loss, having no hope and believing they would die (have no life, **zao**).

Many Christians give up well before reaching this kind of utter desolation! We rely only on our emotions and sink into depression as God looks on, exasperated by our lack of trust in Him. Paul and his co-workers had *real* cause for alarm. They were close to death! Yet, what does he say? Because they had the 'sentence of death' within, they could not trust in their own responses, but handed over their whole situation to God, for it is He Who can raise them from the dead!

Paul, in the direst of circumstances, did not fail or falter. He did not sink into depression. No, he

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handed over his life to God and God took over. The 'sentence' Paul refers to means 'an answer'. His answer to his perilous position was to ask himself "Will I come out safely from this situation? No, I must die!" once he resigned himself to his fate under God, God took him up and gave him joyous help and salvation! If we continue to cling to our mortal toil, emotions and human endeavours, we will indeed die, for God cannot give His mercy or deliverance.

God, says Paul, raises the dead. Therefore, if he dies, God will do the same for him. Paul then relaxed in his heart and mind, for his soul was at peace. Once he did that, God could work in his life and deliver him from his trials. This remarkable truth was being shared with the Corinthians – and it is shared with us today, if we truly trust.

This activity of God is well within His remit, for if He can save us from 'so great a death' (verse 9), hell as a reward for our evil state, and continues to save us from it in this life, then we can put all our trust in Him to deliver us throughout our lives. And, knowing we were once unsaved and bound for hell should be sufficient to send us flying to God for His mercy.

Note that the prayers of others are 'helping together' to deliver the apostles. **Sunupourgeo** is to accompany or be beside another, in union with them,

sun

, in their enterprise,

ergon

. We see here that whilst Christians are not perfect, and even sin in spectacular fashion, they may nevertheless pray for, and be in union with, others whose ministries need prayer and support.

The prayer in this text is **deesis**, asking (or even begging, **deomai**) God to deliver from some problem. It seems that though Paul had occasion to rebuke the Corinthians, they stayed loyal to him anyway, overcoming their embarrassment at being rebuked. Do we do this today? Few Christians, when rebuked, remain loyal or even friendly. Instead, they often leave their church and retain bitterness. We are expected to take rebuke on the chin and then to repent. To go away angry is to double the sin.

The prayers had effect, and so Paul says it was a 'gift' from God, through many Christians. Therefore many Christians could share in the triumph and results. It is always good to hear of spiritual success in the lives of others. If only modern Christians could stop pretending always to be triumphant when they are not, perhaps we might all gain in strength and hope!

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Verses 12-14

1.

“For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

2.

For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end;

3.

As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul says he is rejoicing in the testimony of his conscience. He is **kauchesis**, glorying because the testimony, **mar**

turion

(witness of his conscience), of his

suneidesis

– his soul, that is able to distinguish good from bad, in all simplicity and sincerity, makes him joyful. His simplicity,

haplotes

, refers to one who speaks openly in truth; his sincerity,

heilikrineia

, refers to purity that stands scrutiny in the light,

heilikrines

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Why is Paul so joyful? He says that his spirit or soul, as dictated by God, and not by his ‘fleshly wisdom’, has enjoyed his conversation in the world with the Corinthians. That is, he has lived amongst them with much joy and benefit.

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He is also joyful that the Corinthians acknowledge and accept what he has been teaching, and he has only taught them what they had known before from him. So, they can trust his words, for they are consistent. Paul says he prays they will remain true to God's word to the end of time. As the Corinthians knew Paul and his ministry personally and accepted what he taught with rejoicing, so he rejoiced that they would join with him at the last trump ("the day of the Lord Jesus"). Do we rejoice in the ministry of others, and do they rejoice in ours?

Verses 15-20

1.

"And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit;

2.

And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judea.

3.

When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? Or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

4.

But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.

5.

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me Silvanus and Tomotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.

6.

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."

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Relying on his perception of the Corinthians (confidence; **pepoithesis**), and bolstered by it, Paul wished to visit the Corinthians again so they would have a 'second benefit', a

charis

for the

deuteros

– kindness, joy and delight for the second time. From this we can deduce the proposed visit spoken of in the First Epistle had not yet come about.

He thought he could go to Macedonia in the north via Corinth, instead of getting there via the northern part of Asia (Turkey). Then, he could have gone home to Judaea via Corinth again. This was Corinth he was talking about – the place that attracted his rebuke mingled with love. They had marred his teaching to them, yet he remained their mentor and kind elder. Can we do this with people who ignore or twist our words? Can we bother with them if they go their own way? Only a true friend will speak the truth no matter what the consequences are.

Was I speaking in 'lightness', **elaphria**, with fickleness, or was I too quick, **elaphros**, when I sought to do this, asks Paul? Or, did I decide on it by human reasoning and desire? Did I give a strong affirmation, or a definite 'No', using my own mind and thoughts? No, just as God is to be trusted, so you can trust that my decision was not of human origin.

(Note: yes and no being a figure of the change of mind of human beings).

I say this, says Paul, because Jesus Christ, whose words were given faithfully to you by myself, Timothy and Silas (*Silvanus – 'woody', a leading elder in Jerusalem and revered teacher, he was a Greek Jew and a Roman citizen like Paul*), did not speak as a mere human being either. Rather, Jesus' words were always 'yeah',

nai

, truth assuredly of God.

All the promises (blessings) of God (verse 20) are "in him", in His very person and character, and are strongly affirmed and Amen - faithful, firm and fulfilled. They praise God through the preaching and teaching of the apostles, who faithfully relate what Christ taught. Any human teacher or preacher, to be trusted, MUST preach and teach God's word, no more and no less. Anything else is humanised 'yea' and 'nay', capable of variability, change and lability.

Verses 21-24

1.

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“Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God.

2.

Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

3.

Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.

4.

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand.”

It is God, says Paul, Who **bebaioo**, confirms the authority of Paul and the apostles in Christ, with the Corinthians, making their words firm and trustworthy. Thus the trust they have in Paul is really a trust in God. It was God Who anointed them, **chrio**; given the gifts of the Spirit to enable them to carry out their consecrated office.

God also ‘sealed’ them, **sphragizo**; marked them with His own protection and gave them security from Satan. They also were given the gift of the ‘earnest of the Spirit’ in their hearts – the pledge that what they preached, eternal life, would come to pass, the pledge, **arrhabon**, being but a legal down-payment, given by the Holy Spirit.

Paul then told them he did not come to Corinth as suggested, in order to spare them, **pheidomai**. It can also mean to abstain. God was His witness, says Paul. The next verse suggests his visit would have been to remonstrate with them in a hard manner. But, for reasons of His own, God constrained Paul from going at that time, possibly to give them the opportunity to get themselves right with God before he came.

Not that the apostles wanted to lord it over the Corinthians and their trust in God, says Paul.

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They only wanted to help them to know true joy. They are acting only as ***sunergos***: companions or labourers together. How many Christians look up to the pastors and teachers of this world, treating them like demi-gods, when all they are is fellow labourers? How many pastors and 'great' preachers have little time for the lowliest in the churches? Yet, we are all fellow labourers, co-workers, in the kingdom of God. Each of us, lowly or great, has his vital and proper place in the Church.

Then, Paul gives a resounding statement of election and predestination: "by faith ye stand." Not by teaching, or by human manipulation or pressure. Not by formal or informal rebuke. Not by human reasoning or even by anger. Only by trust in God, which is His free gift given as He wishes. Only by God's direct command and prompting can a man stand, ***histemi***, become established as a Believer or remain faithful. Therefore we cannot blame, or praise, a man who is saved or faithful. It is a gift of God, to be joyfully received if given to you, and prayed over for those who do not, for who knows if God has kept back His gifts of salvation for a later time? None of us knows, and that is why we must pray for the unsaved, treating them kindly so long as they permit, and yet stay apart from them socially so our minds and hearts remain clear.

May God have a 'record upon our souls' that we are faithful and true, loving those who are without the kingdom and thereby proving our own salvation to be true.

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