

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS : AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

I. THE COMFORT OF GOD (Ch. 1: 1-7: 16)

(a) *Salutation* (Ch. 1: 1-2)

TO the Church of God established at Corinth, with all God's holy people throughout the whole of Achaia, this letter comes from Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus in accordance with God's will, and from our brother Timothy. Grace and peace be yours, from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

(b) *Thanksgiving for divine comfort* (Ch. 1: 3-7)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ! He is the most compassionate Father, the God from whom all comfort comes. It is He who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we in our turn are able to comfort others who are enduring any kind of affliction with that same comfort which we ourselves have experienced at God's hands. Just as the sufferings of Christ are multiplied in our experience, so also through Christ is our comfort multiplied. Whatever affliction we have to endure is endured for the sake of your comfort and deliverance. On the other hand, whatever comfort we receive is received with a view to your comfort—your comfort which results from your patient endurance of the same sufferings as we ourselves endure. This hope which we cherish for you is well founded, for we know that since you have a share in our sufferings, you will also have a share in the comfort which we enjoy.

(c) *Paul's deliverance from deadly peril* (Ch. 1: 8-11)

Why do I talk like this about affliction and comfort? For this reason, which you ought to know about, my brothers. We have come to know the meaning of affliction by our experiences in the province of Asia. Affliction, do I say? We were overwhelmed and pressed down beyond measure, beyond our strength. We gave up all hope of having our lives spared; indeed, in our own minds we were already sentenced to death, and this was ordered in the providence of God so that we should abandon all trust in ourselves and place our trust solely in God, who alone can raise

the dead. For our deliverance from so terrible a death as threatened us was a veritable resurrection; and God, who wrought this deliverance for us, will deliver us yet again. It is on Him that we have set our hope for further deliverance, and you also can help by praying for us, so that thanks will be given to God by many persons for His grace granted us through the prayer of many.

(d) Explanation of his recent conduct towards them

(Ch. 1: 12-2: 17)

This is our boast, this is the witness which our conscience bears us, that our conduct in the world at large, and more especially towards you, has been pure and sincere, in the sight of God. It is the grace of God and not mere human wisdom that has dictated our actions. And when I write like this, I am writing nothing but what you acknowledge to be true as you read it. I hope, indeed, that you will acknowledge this fully, as you have already acknowledged it in part, that you can boast of us as much as we do of you in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I was so confident of this that I wanted to come to you earlier, so that your joy¹ might be doubled; I wanted first of all to visit you on my way to Macedonia and then to come to you again on my way back from Macedonia, so that you could speed me forth on my journey to Judaea. Was it fickleness on my part to want to do this, when I did not carry it out? Do I make plans according to the mood of the moment, saying "Yes" today and "No" tomorrow? God is my sure witness that my language towards you is consistent, not a vacillating "Yes" and "No". My example is Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was proclaimed among you by us — by Silvanus, Timothy and me — for there is no "Yes" and "No" with Him; in Him the sure "Yes" has taken effect. I mean that all the promises of God receive their answering "Yes!" in Him; and for that reason it is through Him that our answering "Amen!" goes up to God, for His glory. It is God who gives us our firm standing in Christ, along with you; it is God who has anointed us for our service, who has set His seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as His sure pledge.

Well then, you will ask, why was it that I did not come to Corinth? I will tell you — and I call God as witness against my heart and conscience if what I say is false — my reason for not coming to Corinth, as I had intended, was in order to spare you. We are not dictators over your faith, by which you stand before

¹ Reading χαράν ('joy') as against χάρις ('grace').

God; but we are fellow-workers for your joy. No; I decided in my own mind that I would not pay you another painful visit. If I cause you pain, who is going to cheer my heart but the very one whom I have hurt? It was precisely for this reason that I wrote as I did; I did not want to come and suffer pain among the very people from whom I ought to have joy. You see, I had sufficient confidence in you to know that if I did have joy, that joy would be shared by you all. Instead of coming to see you, therefore, I wrote a letter; I wrote it in great affliction and distress of heart, with many tears, and it was not to cause you pain that I did this, but to let you know how overwhelming was my love for you.

If any one has caused pain², he has caused it not only to me, but to some extent (not to overstress it) to you all. Let the penalty which was imposed on the person concerned by the majority of you suffice; now, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, or else he may be completely swallowed up by the excess of his grief. So please do assure him of your love for him. This was my very purpose in writing, to put you to the test and find out if you were obedient to me in everything. If you forgive him, so do I. Indeed any forgiving on my side (supposing that I had anything to forgive) was for your sakes in the presence of Christ; I did not want Satan to gain any advantage over us, for we are not unacquainted with his schemes.

When I came to the Troad to preach the gospel of Christ there, and found a door wide open for me by the Lord's overruling, I could not take proper advantage of it; I could not feel settled in my mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I bade them farewell and departed for Macedonia.³

Now thanks be to God, who always gives us a place of honour in Christ's triumphal procession! He spreads abroad the fragrance of His knowledge through us wherever we go. To God we present the sweet fragrance of Christ alike among those who receive His salvation and those who perish for lack of it. Among the latter it is an odour of death, which leads to death; among the former an odour of life, imparting life.

Who is equal to the responsibility of such a calling? We are not like so many who adulterate the message of God and pass

² Evidently some member of the Corinthian church who had led the opposition to Paul.

³ Where he met Titus and was greatly relieved by the news he brought from Corinth (Ch. 7: 5 ff.).

it off like so much second-rate merchandise; we proclaim His genuine word, in the power of Christ and in the sight of God, as those commissioned by Him.

(e) *The old code and the new Spirit* (Ch. 3: 1-18)

Are we beginning to commend ourselves all over again? (That is no doubt what some of you are thinking.) Surely we do not require letters of commendation to you, or from you, as some people do! Why, you yourselves are *our* letter of commendation, a letter inscribed on your hearts, which everyone can recognize and read. It is clearly shown by your lives that you are a letter from Christ Himself (we are only His amanuenses) — a letter not written with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not inscribed on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, on your hearts.

Such is our confidence before God, a confidence which is ours through Christ. It is not as though we were fit in our own wisdom to conceive a single thought on our own initiative; our fitness comes from God. It is He who has fitted us to be ministers of a new covenant, a covenant which is constituted by the Spirit, not by a written code. The written code condemns us to death; the Spirit imparts life.

And yet the ministry of death, engraved as a written code on tablets of stone, was attended by divine glory. You remember how the children of Israel could not keep their eyes fixed on Moses' face because of the glory which shone on it.⁴ But that glory was one that vanished away. How much greater, therefore, must be the divine glory with which the ministry of life is invested! If the ministry of condemnation was so glorious, surely the ministry of justification must be more exceedingly glorious! Indeed, the glory which invested the former dispensation must appear to be positively deficient in glory, when it is contrasted with the excelling glory of the new order. If a vanishing order was attended by glory, far greater must be the glory which attends the new order, the order that abides for ever.

So, with such a hope as this, we exercise the utmost boldness. It is not with us as it was with Moses. He put a veil on his face,⁵ to prevent the Israelites from gazing without restriction on a glory which was to vanish away. This shows us that their perception has become dull. To this very day the same veil remains there when the old covenant is read; it is not lifted because it is only in Christ that it is abolished. Yes, to this very day,

⁴ Ex. 34: 30.

⁵ Ex. 34: 33.

whenever Moses' law is read, a veil envelops their understanding; only by turning to the Lord can one have the veil taken off.⁶ Now "the Lord" means "the Spirit"; wherever the Spirit of the Lord is present, bondage gives way to freedom. It is without a veil upon our faces that all of us look upon the glory of the Lord, and we reflect the glory upon which we look,⁷ being transfigured into the same likeness, from one degree of glory to another, by the agency of the Lord who is the Spirit.

(To be continued)

⁶ A reference to Ex. 34: 34, "whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the veil off". Paul goes on to say that when the present counterpart to Moses' experience is being traced, "the LORD" in that verse must be interpreted as a reference to the Spirit.

⁷ As Moses reflected the glory of God after he had communed with Him on Sinai (Ex. 34: 29). The verb κατοπτρίζομαι, here used by Paul, means to reflect like a mirror.