

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS COMMENTARY

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**BIC Volume 11**  
**Second Corinthians**  
**Lorin L Cranford**

Proem:

Topic 10.2.2  
2 Cor. 1:3-11

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**10.2.2 Proem**

3 Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν καὶ θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως, 4 ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως ἧς παρακαλούμεθα αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ. 5 ὅτι καθὼς περισσεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς, οὕτως διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ περισσεύει καὶ ἡ παράκλησις ἡμῶν. 6 εἴτε δὲ θλιβόμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας· εἴτε παρακαλούμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως τῆς ἐνεργουμένης ἐν ὑπομονῇ τῶν αὐτῶν παθημάτων ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν. 7 καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν βεβαία ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν εἰδότες ὅτι ὡς κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων, οὕτως καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως.

8 Οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν τῆς γενομένης ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ὑπὲρ δύναμιν ἐβαρῆθημεν ὥστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν· 9 ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου ἐσχέκαμεν, ἵνα μὴ πεποιθότες ὦμεν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ ἐγείροντι τοὺς νεκρούς· 10 ὃς ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς καὶ ῥύσεται, εἰς ὃν ἠλπίκαμεν [ὅτι] καὶ ἔτι ῥύσεται, 11 συνυπουργούντων καὶ ὑμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῇ δεήσει, ἵνα ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστηθῇ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, 4 who consoles 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 consoled 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 consoled, 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.

In ancient Greek letters the salutatio usually led directly into a prayer wish from the letter sender. This is the proem section in Paul's letters and typically is much longer than that found in ancient secular letters. Also, especially in the Proem section the expansion elements beyond the core expression of thanksgiving additionally serve to signal major themes to be developed in the letter body.

The Proem of Second Corinthians goes a slightly different direction than do those of Paul's other letters in all but the pastoral letters and Ephesians. The dominant formula introduction is Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου, I give thanks to my God.... Minor deviations such as a plural form may occur but this is found in 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 2 Thess. 1:3-12; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Rom. 1:8-15; Philm. 4-7; Col. 1:3-12; Phil. 1:3-11 (7 of the 13 letters).<sup>1</sup> Only<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor.

<sup>1</sup>1-2 Timothy with their distinct emphasis have Χάριν ἔχω τῷ, I have praise to (God). And Titus omits a proem. ...

<sup>2</sup>But outside the Pauline corpus of letters, the Proem of 1 Peter 1:3-9 adopts this Pauline formula in its opening declaration: Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Thanks be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.... This

Proem

1 <sup>1.3</sup> **Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς (ἔστω)**  
καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,  
ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρισμῶν  
καὶ  
θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως,  
1.4 ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς  
ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν  
εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει  
διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως |  
/-----|  
ἧς παρακαλούμεθα αὐτοὶ  
ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ.

1.5 ὅτι  
καθὼς περισσεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς,  
οὕτως  
διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ

2 **περισσεύει καὶ ἡ παράκλησις ἡμῶν.**

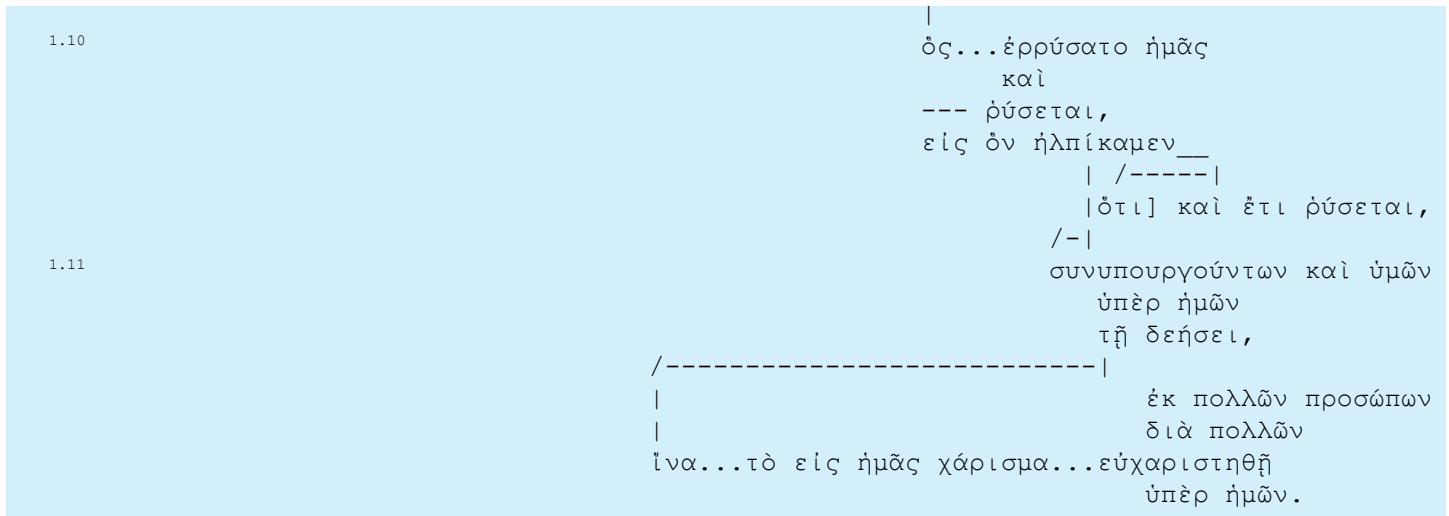
1.6 δὲ  
εἴτε θλιβόμεθα,  
3 **(θλιβόμεθα)**  
ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας·  
εἴτε παρακαλούμεθα,

4 **(παρακαλούμεθα)**  
ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως  
τῆς ἐνεργουμένης  
ἐν ὑπομονῇ  
τῶν αὐτῶν παθημάτων  
ῶν καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν.

1.7 καὶ  
5 **ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν βεβαία (ἐστίν)**  
ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν  
εἰδότες  
ὡς κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων,  
ὅτι...οὕτως (ἐστε) καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως.

1.8 γὰρ  
6 **Οὐ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν,**  
ἀδελφοί,  
ὑπὲρ τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν  
τῆς γενομένης  
ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ,  
καθ' ὑπερβολὴν  
ὑπὲρ δύναμιν  
ὅτι...ἐβάρηθημεν  
ὥστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν·

1.9 ἀλλ'  
ἐν ἑαυτοῖς  
7 **αὐτοὶ...τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου ἐσχίκαμεν,**  
ἵνα μὴ πεποιθότες ᾦμεν  
ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς  
ἀλλ'  
--- (πεποιθότες ᾦμεν)  
ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ  
τῷ ἐγείροντι τοὺς νεκρούς·  
| ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου

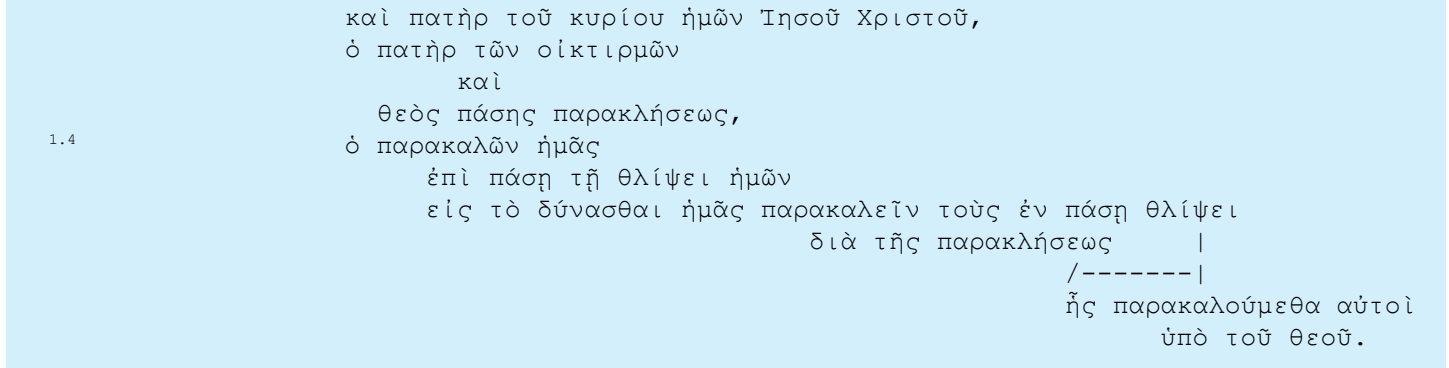


1:3-11 and Eph. 1:3-23 reflect a significant modification with Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ....*<sup>3</sup> The different thrust of the expansion elements for both these proems reveals why the apostle used a different introductory formula. True to both his creativity and literary integrity, he uses a different introductory formula when the content of the proem is different.

**10.2.2.1 The thanksgiving to God** remains in tact as is true for all the proems. But in 2 Cor. 1:3-11, the emphasis upon not upon Paul's readers, the Corinthians, and his thankfulness to God for them. Although this was the case in First Corinthians, now the focus is upon God's deliverance of Paul out of some horrific situations that posed serious danger to his physical life.

But true to the pauline use of the longer proem, the expansion elements set the stage for the entire letter body with a repeated stress upon the ministry that God had called him to carry out. To be sure, this will be approached several different ways in 1:12- 3:10. But Paul's ministry remains the underlying theme of the entire letter from the proem to the end of the letter body.

**1<sup>1-3</sup> Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς (ἔστω)**



reflects a Pauline influence via Silas serving as the writing secretary of First Peter (cf. 5:12). This evidently came to be considered more appropriate for a letter written to multiple audiences as was the case for both Ephesians and First Peter.

<sup>3</sup>The use of a single sentence in Eph. 1:3-14 as the thanksgiving section (vv. 15-23 are the intercessory section) clearly has its own distinct trinitarian praise of God for the circular letter.

The proem sets up the core foundation of thankfulness to God for preserving Paul through hardships so that he could continue serving God through Christ. This sets Second Corinthians apart as a pauline letter from all of the others.

The block diagram below visually underscores the heart of the Proem as expressed in the first core declaration (#1). The focus is unusually centered upon thanksgiving to God who is identified in several ways through the qualifying expansion elements. The elliptical omission of a verb intensifies the attribution of the quality of Εὐλογητὸς, which literally defines *good words spoken to or about someone*. The adjective εὐλογητός, -ή, -όν is used some seven times with three of these introducing a proem of praise expressed to God 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3. Another instance in 2 Cor. 11:31 surfaces as part of an oath that Paul swears regarding his apostleship. The background of the 84 uses in the LXX define the thrust of meaning as thanksgiving offered up verbally to God.

The expansion elements in this initial core declaration amplify the praiseworthiness of God.

**ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Note this exact beginning phrase is repeated in all three proem expressions in 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; and 1 Pet. 1:3. Similarly it is repeated by Paul in 11:31 in the oath expression:

ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ οἶδεν, ὁ ὢν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι.

**The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie.**

This repetition signals a formula background for this expression which can be identified from the Jewish prayer of blessing spoken in the synagogue gatherings as an opening prayer.<sup>4</sup> These were drawn from the LXX translation pattern such as Psa. 72:18-19 (LXX, 71:18-19):

18 Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ ὁ ποιῶν θαυμάσια μόνος,†

19 καὶ εὐλογητὸν τὸ ὄνομα τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος,

18 Thanks be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, the One exclusively doing wondrous things

19 And thanks be to the name of His glory for the age and forever and ever.

Here Εὐλογητὸς translates the Hebrew בָּרַךְ, meaning blessed and also Baruch.<sup>5</sup> The Jewish *berakah*, prayer of blessing, stands behind the opening prayer expression of the Jewish Christian leader. Those Corinthian members with a Jewish background and the Gentiles who had attended the Jewish synagogue would have heard this echo in the wording of Paul's opening prayer of this letter.

This opening formula ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ clearly asserts the deity of Christ as God's Son. Had Christianity adopted such a formula expression for opening the house church gatherings? Possibly so and Paul either picks up on it or reflects his influence previously on shaping the structuring of those meetings. Clearly the Jewish heritage of Zechariah stands in the background of his thanksgiving to God for the birth of John in his dedication in the Jerusalem tem-

<sup>4</sup>The analysis of Murray Harris in the NIGTC correctly identifies the abnormal circumstance of Paul's experience of hardships as a contributing factor to this alternation of his usual proem introductory statement. But Harris overlooks the formula nature of all three proems beginning with Εὐλογητὸς, plus the additional association of Εὐλογητὸς with ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ also in 11:31 that surfaces as well in a formal expression of oath. Both Harris in the NIGTC and Martin in both editions of the WBC falsely label this a doxology rather than understanding the nature of the epistolary proem both in ancient literature and in Paul's use of it in his letters. More on target is Talbert's analysis of this modified proem:

Instead of the usual prayer form (thanksgiving—Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4; Phil 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 2 Thess 1:3; petition—Rom 1:10; Phil 1:9; 1 Thess 3:11; 2 Thess 1:11), Paul uses a *berakah*, a blessing form (1 Kgs 8:14; Ps 72:18–19; 2 Macc 1:17; Luke 1:68; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3): “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” To speak this way does not mean to confer blessings on God but to praise or thank him for his blessings

[Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, Rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 164.]

<sup>5</sup>1263. בָּרוּךְ Bārūwk, *baw-rook'*; pass. part. from 1288; *bless-ed*; Baruk, the name of three Isr.:—Baruch. [CDWGTB]

ple: Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, ὅτι ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ, **Thanks be to the God of Israel** because He has looked favorably on His people and has redeemed them (Lk. 1:68). Thus a Christian *berakah* style Jewish prayer in early Christianity reflects a close linkage of the God of Israel with Jesus Christ. This Paul utilizes in his opening prayer of thanksgiving in Second Corinthians.

**ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν καὶ θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.** This expansion element not only continues the heavy Jewish tones in its wording but prepares for the next element in v. 4. Note how a similar emphasis unfolds in the other two proems:

**Eph. 1:3.** Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ, **Thanks be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ....**

**1 Pet. 1:3** Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν, **Thanks be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has given us birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**

The emphasis naturally moves from thanksgiving to a focus on God as merciful and gracious to His people. And for Paul, as well as Peter, this is embedded in the relationship between God and Christ as His Son. God's stance of showing favor (τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν) rather than wrath stands as the source of παρακλήσεως, comfort. The term οἰκτιρμός reflects a divine display of compassion and concern. Here in the plural form οἰκτιρμῶν in the very Hebraistic phrase ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν the idea moves to multiple expressions arising from God as their source.

This leads then to θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως, **God of all comfort.** The term παράκλησις is one of those Greek terms with such depth of meaning that any modern translation of it sheds most of its meaning in translation. For English, it encompasses the ideas of encouragement, exhortation, appeal, comfort, consolation etc. And, as the chart below indicates, παράκλησις in LXX translation picks up a wide variety of Hebrew terms out of the OT. The combining of οἰκτιρμῶν and παρακλήσεως, with both in the plural form, stresses concrete demonstrations of God's mercy in specific situations. And it is this which has lifted Paul out of any tendency toward self-pity or depression from these situations. Paul's experiencing of the many expressions of divine mercy means also, at the same time, that which encourages and comforts him. The reality here is better



**ΔΙΠΛΗ** tanhūm | 4 of 16

**Ps 93:19** Κύριε, κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ὁδῶν μου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ μου, αἱ παράκλησις σου ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν μου.

**Job 21:2** Ἀκούσατε, ἀκούσατέ μου τῶν λόγων, ἵνα μὴ ᾖ μοι παρ' ὑμῶν αὐτὴ ἡ παράκλησις.

**Is 66:11** ἵνα θηλάσῃτε καὶ ἐμπλησθῆτε ἀπὸ μαστοῦ παράκλησις αὐτῆς, ἵνα ἐκθηλάσαντες τρυφήσῃτε ἀπὸ εἰσόδου δόξης αὐτῆς.

**Je 16:7** καὶ οὐ μὴ κλασθῆ ἄρτος ἐν πένθει αὐτῶν εἰς παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τεθνηκότι· οὐ ποτιοῦσιν αὐτὸν ποτήριον εἰς παράκλησιν ἐπὶ πατρὶ καὶ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ.

**ΔΠΝ** nhm | 2 of 16

**Na 3:7** καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὁ ὄρων σε καταβήσεται ἀπὸ σοῦ καὶ ἐρεῖ Δεῖλαία Νινευή· τίς στενάξει αὐτήν; πόθεν ζητήσω παράκλησιν αὐτῆ;

**Je 16:7** καὶ οὐ μὴ κλασθῆ ἄρτος ἐν πένθει αὐτῶν εἰς παράκλησιν ἐπὶ τεθνηκότι· οὐ ποτιοῦσιν αὐτὸν ποτήριον εἰς παράκλησιν ἐπὶ πατρὶ καὶ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ.

**ΔΠΣ** nsham | 1 of 16

**Ho 13:14** ἐκ χειρὸς ἄδου ῥύσομαι καὶ ἐκ θανάτου λυτρώσομαι αὐτούς· ποῦ ἡ δίκη σου, θάνατε; ποῦ τὸ κέντρον σου, ᾄδι; παράκλησις κέκρυπται ἀπὸ ὀφθαλμῶν μου,

**ΤΥΨΙΤ** tūšiyā | 1 of 16

**Is 28:29** καὶ ταῦτα παρὰ Κυρίου σαβαὼθ ἐξῆλθεν τὰ τέρατα· βουλεύσασθε, ὑψώσατε ματαίαν παράκλησιν.

no equivalent | 1 of 16

**Is 30:7** Αἰγύπτιοι μάταια καὶ κενὰ ὠφελήσουσιν ὑμᾶς· ἀπάγγειλαν αὐτοῖς ὅτι ματαία ἡ παράκλησις ὑμῶν αὐτῆ.

**ΔΥΡΠΣ** nihumim | 1 of 16

**Is 57:18** τὰς ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐόρακα, καὶ ἰασάμην αὐτὸν καὶ παρεκάλεσα αὐτὸν, καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῷ παράκλησιν ἀληθινήν,

**ΤΜΠΣ** tahānūn | 1 of 16

**Je 38:9** ἐν κλαυθμῷ ἐξῆλθον, καὶ ἐν παρακλήσει ἀνάξω αὐτούς, αὐλίζων ἐπὶ διώρυγας ὑδάτων ἐν ὁδῷ ὀρθῆ, καὶ οὐ μὴ πληθυνθῶσιν ἐν αὐτῇ· ὅτι ἐγενόμην τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ Ἐφραὴμ πρωτότοκος μου ἔστιν.

understood experientially than rationally.

Also important here is the unique structure with which both these two phrases are set up using a basic principle of Greek grammar not easily brought out in translation:

ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ  
ὁ πατήρ...καὶ θεὸς

Two things should be noted. First note the θεὸς / πατήρ // πατήρ / θεὸς chiasistic structure: AB//B'A'. The One who produces these experiences is first and foremost θεὸς, God. But these experiences show Him most significantly as πατήρ, Father. This central affirmation of God set Christianity apart from other religions of Paul's day.

Secondly, note the unity structure here with the standard Greek pattern:

Article Noun + Noun (1 + 1 = 1)  
ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ  
ὁ πατήρ...καὶ θεὸς

This means that only one person is referenced although from two different angles as both θεὸς and πατήρ. This

certainly by θεὸς.

*ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως ἧς παρακαλούμεθα αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ. The One who comforts us in our every affliction so that we can comfort those in their every affliction through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

Now the point of the first two stichs becomes clear in this third one found in v. 4. The God who gives comfort expects His people also to give comfort to others. The flow of divine comfort must not dead end in us! Rather, it is to be a flowing river passing through us into the lives of others! That way it stands as a "Sea of Galilee" full of life and nourishment, rather than a "Dead Sea" filled with nothing but the leftovers of death and ruin.

The common circumstance between us as believers and others is here depicted as ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει, in af-

close link of θεὸς as πατήρ is found five times inside Second Corinthians: 1:2, 3; 6:18; 11:31. This emphasis upon God as Father, while not unique to Christianity, was central in Christian belief and came out of the teachings of Jesus Himself.

Paul had a clear sense of both dimensions of who God is. He is θεὸς as an all powerful deity to be revered and respected. But unlike the Greek and Roman deities, He is also πατήρ in the sense of a deity who desires close personal relationships with those who are His children. In Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6, this idea is taken a step further via the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek πατήρ: αββα ὁ πατήρ, Abba!, i.e., Father!. The Aramaic stresses close relationship, even beyond what might be understood from the Greek πατήρ. Yet it does not lose the sense of deep reverence and respect, conveyed in the Greek even by πατήρ and

fliction. The meaning behind Paul's use of θλίψις translated as 'affliction' is fleshed out in part in the rationale section of vv. 8-11 where the same term is used. The common θλίψις between Paul and the Corinthians is also deeply connected to τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, the sufferings of Christ. This suffering is then defined with the same term παθημάτων along with the verb derivative πάσχομεν in v. 6. Thus θλίψις and πάθημα are used interchangeably by Paul for hardships derived from persecution for himself and for the Corinthians. But πάθημα alone is used to define what Christ experienced (v. 5).

But as recipients of God's encouragement in times of persecution -- ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν, *He who encourages us in our every affliction* -- we then reach out to give this encouragement to fellow believers undergoing the same things: εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει, *so that we are able to encourage those in their every affliction*. But this ability to comfort others does not come from within us and our abilities. The παράκλησις that we can share is actually that which has come from God through Christ: διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως ἧς παρακαλούμεθα αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, *through the encouragement by which we ourselves have been encouraged by God*. This rather complex sentence, that is unfolding here, is a beautiful binding together in ancient Koine Greek of some of the most profound spiritual insights that exist. The core idea of παράκλησις / παρακαλέω (n/v) of coming to stand along side of another in providing needed help here pictures God first doing that with us as believers and then through what came through Christ in this παράκλησις is to then be passed on to fellow believers experiencing affliction as well. Paul gives here a beautiful picture of διακονία, *ministry/service* for the believing community. Note that this noun is used nine times in Second Corinthians along with its parallel λειτουργία (1x) that pictures the same reality through the figurative expression of service rendered by a temple priest. This signals a major point of emphasis for the letter body of Second Corinthians.

One should also note the extensiveness of the giving of παράκλησις. Since God has met us τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν, *in our every affliction*, we then are to share that παράκλησις with τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει, *those in their every affliction*. We cannot be selective about when and to whom we share παράκλησις. We are to stand along side fellow believers at all times in order to become a channel of God's encouragement to them.

And to be sure that Paul's readers understand clearly his point he inserts a subordinate causal ὅτι clause that elaborates the details of what has been declared thus far (v. 5). ὅτι καθὼς περισσεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς, οὕτως διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ περισσεύει καὶ ἡ παράκλησις ἡμῶν. *For just as the sufferings of Christ*

*are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ*. Here is a challenge to Bible translators that is virtually impossible to overcome in most of the modern western languages. In verse 8, the coordinate level causal conjunction γὰρ introduces the significant amplification of the ideas in vv. 3-7. But in v. 5, the subordinate causal conjunction ὅτι introduces a secondary level amplification mainly of just the infinitive phrase beginning with ὁ παρακαλῶν and contained in verse 4. Since almost universal ignorance of coordinate and subordinate conjunctions exists in modern English, especially the American version of it, both Bible translators and most commentators ignore these distinctions and impose a different set of assumptions down upon the biblical text. The NRSV handling of this is a prime example with its use of 'for' to introduce v. 4 with ὅτι and then completely ignore γὰρ in v. 8. But 'for' is only usable in English as either a preposition or coordinate conjunction, it is thus incorrect with a subordinate clause. The correct English subordinate conjunction here for ὅτι is 'because of.' But in English a subordinate conjunction can't introduce a coordinate clause expressed in English.<sup>6</sup>

What v. 5 explains is how the move of divine παράκλησις flows from God to us and then through us to others. Its central God's structuring of the Christian life and is reflected also in Jesus' declaration in Mt. 5:16, οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. *In the same way let the light in you shine before people so that they see your good works and praise your Father in Heaven*.

Verse 6 adds a second declaration to this causal expression although at a primary clause level: εἴτε δὲ θλιβόμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας:

<sup>6</sup>It is very laughable to try to sort this out using most of the English language grammars of ancient Greek, especially of Koine Greek. The majority explain this common pattern in ancient Greek in terms of the limited English language grammar with the absurd claim that the NT sometimes substituted ὅτι for γὰρ. But this is completely incorrect. Ancient Greek grammar should be explained within the framework of how it worked grammatically in the ancient world. Noting the differences between authentic Greek grammar function in that world and the limitations of modern western languages should be given, not ignored. Again the modern German grammars of ancient Greek tend to be right on target here, while the English language grammars mostly miss the point.

The ancient Greek mind had a very clear sense of primary and secondary level ideas, and their language, especially classical Greek, reflected this quite clearly. Much time was spent both in oratory and in writing is learning how to carefully balance out these distinctions. With only oral pauses being used for idea separation both in speaking and in reading written materials (with no punctuation marks or spaces between words), understanding such distinctions and how to communicate them clearly was central to skill development with the language.

εἶτε παρακαλούμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως τῆς ἐνεργουμένης ἐν ὑπομονῇ τῶν αὐτῶν παθημάτων ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν. *And whether we are being afflicted, it is in behalf of your encouragement and deliverance; whether whether we are being encouraged, it is in behalf of your encouragement that is being energized in perservance of the same sufferings which we also suffer.* What Paul and his associates were experiencing in persecution was for the sake of encouraging the Corinthians to be true to Christ and discover God's deliverance in the process. Even the divine encouragement given to Paul by God served to encourage the Corinthians through a divine infusion of perservance in the face of sufferings common to those of Paul and his associates.

This application in v. 6 of the divine principle of παράκλησις set forth in vv. 4-5 makes abundantly clear what Paul has touched on with παράκλησις. Ingenuously he has used the first person plural throughout this larger section of vv. 3ff. to reference primarily himself and Timothy from the superscriptio (v. 1). But also in the more principalized aspects of vv. 3-11 especially the 'we' means 'we believers' in Christ. This he does while maintaining a distinction between ἡμᾶς/ ἡμῶν and ὑμῶν in the idea expression.

He ends this section (vv. 3-7) on a positive note in verse 7 regarding the Corinthians: καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν βεβαία ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν εἰδότες ὅτι ὡς κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων, οὕτως καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως. *And our confidence is strong for you knowing that as you are participants in sufferings you also are in the same way with encouragement.* Some see eschatological projections in this, but contextually no clear signal of such exists in the text itself. παράκλησεως at the end of verse 7 is sometimes translated 'consolation' implying end times. But the contextual use of παράκλησις throughout these verses defines encouragement experienced here and now in the midst of suffering persecution. ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν at the beginning should be translated according to its literal meaning of confidence. When linked to ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, regarding you, it clearly expresses Paul's confidence in the Corinthians experiencing the same παράκλησις as he was out of a common commitment to Christ and service to others.

What has transpired between First Corinthians, written some two or so years before Second Corinthians, is significant improvement in the spiritual life of the church. It was not in any way perfect as chapters 10-13 will illustrate, but the positive side of the church alluded to especially in chapter 16 of First Corinthians had evidently grown stronger in this interim period. Thus the apostle's confidence in the Corinthians to obey Christ was much greater by the writing of Second Corinthians.

In the usual pattern of the proem in Paul's letters, the prayer of thanksgiving to God for his readers shades

into a prayer of intercession for even greater spiritual experience with God. But given the unique direction of this proem in Second Corinthians, the second unit of the proem stands an elaboration (via γὰρ) on what stood behind the mentioning of Paul and Timothy's τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν referenced in vv. 3-7. Additionally greater detail regarding the spiritual growth of the Corinthians is mentioned as well. Thus when vv. 3-7 and 8-11 are taken together they stand as a summarizing introduction to the letter body of Second Corinthians and structured in a Proem prayer of praise to God. The sometimes used topic introduction of Οὐ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, *We do not want you to be ignorant...*, signals here a beginning transition into the letter body from the proem itself. Thus Paul moves from one section into another of the letter without giving a signal of a sharp break point between the two sections. And this was normal not just for Paul but among the writers of more formal letters generally in the ancient world. Here in Second Corinthians with the role of this unique proem, such transitional signals would be expected since essentially the two sections represent a continuation of a common theme. The contents of the letter body largely amplify the core points especially in vv. 3-7. The causal γὰρ in v. 8 sets up vv. 8-11 as an important rationale for vv. 3-7, thus getting the readers and listeners of this letter ready for the detailed development in the letter body of the principle of παράκλησις as Paul had experienced it in ministry, especially in regard to the church at Corinth.

**10.2.2.2 Confidence in God.** The central point of vv. 8-11 is stated in the amplification of the introductory Οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί. The prepositional phrase ὑπὲρ τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν τῆς γενομένης ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, *regarding our affliction which happened in Asia*, identifies the primary θλίψις of Paul and Timothy as having occurred during the lengthy ministry in Asia. The wording of the singular form with the participle modifier locating it in Asia refers to something serious that happened to Paul while in Ephesus, the capital of this Roman province.

One immediately thinks of the description of that ministry in Acts 19:1-20:1. But Luke does not describe any event during this three plus year ministry from about 53 through 55 AD that seems to seriously jeopardize Paul's life. The closest thing is the city uproar at the end of this period in vv. 23-36 over the opposition of Demetrius the silversmith. But Luke stresses that Paul was protected by the brothers from direct exposure to harm during this time. Plus Timothy was not in Ephesus at this point according to v. 22. Paul's use of the plural ἡς θλίψεως ἡμῶν, *our affliction*, in v. 8 here implies that both he and Timothy shared this experience.

Of course where ambiguity exists in the scriptural text, commentator speculation abounds all over the

place. But trying to identify the θλίψις as a specific event is hugely difficult given the very limited data provided by Paul, and even by Luke in Acts.<sup>7</sup> Some observations are helpful here. 1) The rather unusual reference ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, in Asia, rather than ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, in Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32; 16:18; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:18) could likely imply this happening elsewhere in the province rather than in Ephesus. Only in Acts 20:16 does a reference to the province imply the city of Ephesus. 2) Probably the event occurred sometime between the writing of First and Second Corinthians. Given the severe impact it had on Paul (cf. vv. 8b-9), it would have been mentioned in First Corinthians had it taken place prior to this letter. This means that the reference to ‘fighting with the beasts in Ephesus’ mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:32 references something else than this event. Also Paul’s limited depiction does not harmonize with the Demetrius episode described by Luke in Acts. 3) Thus this event most likely took place after Paul left Ephesus on his way to Macedonia (cf. Acts 20:1-2). The idea of a chronic illness, i.e., his infamous ‘thorn in the flesh’ (12:7), crippling him in a bout with severe sickness has numerous advocates, possibly on his way north to Troas before crossing over into Macedonia. It’s hard to conceive this happening in Troas since the city was not a part of the province of Asia.

Yet in spite of several possibilities of reference in τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν (1:8), the simple truth is that we have absolutely no idea of what the apostle is referencing here. That doesn’t raise credibility issues about Paul’s statement. Rather it honestly acknowledges that we don’t have enough information for drawing a credible conclusion about the event. Speculation, especially when put forth as solid conclusion, is not only wrong but is potentially dangerous. Ultimately historical identification of this affliction is irrelevant to Paul’s pointing to it. Whatever it may have been, it had a major impact on Paul’s life and his thinking about death.<sup>8</sup>

The impact of this affliction on Paul is here stated in the ὅτι clause of vb. 8b-10, ὅτι καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν ὑπὲρ δυνάμιν ἐβαρῆθημεν ὥστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν, **because we were exceedingly crushed beyond measure so**

<sup>7</sup>A helpful survey of the history of interpretation as well as assessment of the existing data is provided by Murray Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005) in his excursus “PAUL’S AFFLICTION IN ASIA (2 COR. 1:8–11): THE PERSONAL BACKGROUND TO 2 CORINTHIANS,” pp. 164-182.

<sup>8</sup>In my doctoral dissertation completed in 1975, the point was made that this signaled a major shift in the eschatological focus of Paul’s writings. Up to this point his focus was on the parousia of Christ in the assumption that he would be among the living when it occurred. From Second Corinthians on the parousia discussions assume Paul having died prior to it happening.

that we were convinced that we had received a sentence of death, this so that we would not be relying upon ourselves but upon the God who raises the dead, on Him who rescued us out of certain death and will continue rescuing us.

The severity of the event is described with intense expression: καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν ὑπὲρ δυνάμιν ἐβαρῆθημεν, **we were crushed exceedingly beyond measure; ὥστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν, so that we despaired even of living; αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου ἐσχίκαμεν, we indeed felt inwardly that we had received the sentence of death.** Paul never speaks quite the same way about any other negative experience in his life, and by the writing of Second Corinthians in 56 AD there’s a long list of such things that could have been discussed in detail (cf. 11:23-29).<sup>9</sup>

But this affliction was not an end within itself. Instead, it served a much more noble purpose: ἵνα μὴ πεποιθότες ὦμεν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ ἐγείροντι τοὺς νεκρούς, **so that we might not be trusting in ourselves, but rather in the God who raises the dead.** When Paul later makes the declaration that all things work together for good in Rom. 8:28, he speaks out of personally experiencing of this principle at work in his own life. In addition to his θλίψις becoming a channel for divine παράκλησις being passed on to others (1:3-7), this particular θλίψις that he and Timothy experienced in Asia had the divine objective of pushing them to entrust their lives even more completely into the hands of God. This close brush with physical death for them was a significant moment of growing in their confidence that God controls physical death in the lives of His people. When it envelopes a believer, God’s superior power over rides it for all eternity. And such death does not happen outside of God’s plan for His servants. Paul and Timothy’s experience in Asia brought home to them in even greater fashion this fundamental principle of Christian faith.

Even though dying physically seemed certain to these two missionaries in this Asian experience, God’s plan was different (v. 10): ὃς ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς καὶ ρύσεται, εἰς ὃν ἠλπικαμεν [ὅτι] καὶ ἔτι ρύσεται, **who rescued us out of such certain death, and continues to rescue us.** This relative clause links back to τῷ θεῷ as the antecedent of the pronoun ὃς as the Rescuer. The more classical Greek adjective τηλικούτος, -αύτη, -οὔτο stresses intensity and here underscores a situation which appeared humanly speaking to being

<sup>9</sup>One should also note that in the listing of sufferings found in 11:23-29, the majority of items are never described or even alluded to anywhere else in the NT for Paul. That the apostle did not dwell on his sufferings, especially in a ‘woe is me’ mindset becomes very clear in examining the places where sufferings are referenced. That he suffered, and did so exceedingly, is clear. But he never dwelt on them in a manner of inducing pity.



leading to a certain physical death. But this time God rescued Paul and Timothy from certain death in exercising His control over death. The aorist verb ἐρρύσατο stresses this event action in the past.

This is essentially all that Paul mentions about the event. We don't know what it was nor exactly when it happened. All we do know is that it took place somewhere in the province of Asia. Likewise, no details are provided about how God delivered these two leaders from what seemed to be certain death. One thing to note: the continued use of the first person 'we' including Timothy in the experience does argue against the speculative idea that somekind of physical illness connected to his 'thorn in the flesh' was what happened. The danger connected to this θλίψις seems to have come externally from other people. But beyond this nothing more is suggested by the text.

The adding of καὶ ῥύσεται, εἰς ὃν ἠλπικαμεν [ὅτι] καὶ ἔτι ῥύσεται, and he continues rescuing us, in whom we have confidence that he will continue rescuing us, expresses the idea that this danger was continuing for Paul and Timothy even while in Macedonia where this letter was composed. This addendum can be taken legitimately in a couple of slightly different ways, mostly predicated on an understanding of the function of the future tense verb ῥύσεται. If the adverb ἔτι is a part of the original wording, then the punctiliar action of the future tense is favored with ἔτι denoting a repetition at a future time. But ἔτι can also be taken to mean that God will still continue rescuing Paul and Timothy into the future with ῥύσεται denoting linear action in future time, thus underscoring the continued exercising of divine control over the moment of physical death for both these men. In either understanding the essential point of the apostle remains the same: God has control over when we die as His people.

The last addendum to this lengthy sentence in vv. 8-11 adds an important insight closely related to the purpose statements in the ἵνα clause in v. 9b and the amplification in vv. 6-7: συνυπουργούντων καὶ ὑμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῇ δεήσει, ἵνα ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστηθῇ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. 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. The genitive absolute participle phrase, set up with συνυπουργούντων καὶ ὑμῶν, links back to ῥύσεται at the end of v. 10 as an adverbial conditional modifier. That is God's continue rescuing of Paul and Timothy in part depends upon the Corinthians joining Paul and Timothy in prayer for their deliverance and continued witness. This one time use of συνυπουργέω in the NT underscores joint effort on a project by two or more individuals. That effort is defined as ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῇ δεήσει, in our behalf in prayer. But what did Paul ask the

Corinthians to pray for in his and Timothy's behalf? Not that God would keep them from dying! The ἵνα clause lays out the prayer goal: ἵνα ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστηθῇ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. That is, that many people will sense God at work in this situation that Paul and Timothy faced and continue to face and thus give glory and praise for the mighty working of God. Further that many will sense the importance of intercessory prayer for others as a part of their Christian commitment. Again, the focus is not on Paul or Timothy, but rather upon God's working in and through their lives. Some critics of Paul might be inclined to claim that these two figured out some clever way to escape death in this situation, thus denying God's actions. But Paul seeks the prayers of the Corinthians that many people will see God at work and give thanks to Him.

The probing spiritual principle here is challenging to us today. When we face difficult situations what do we pray for? And what do we want others to pray in our regard? I would suspect that most of the time the modern prayer focus is for us to come through the difficulty successfully. But what we can learn from Paul here is that our focus must never be on us. Rather it should center on a witness to the presence and power of God in some situation to bring His people through it. And our request for prayer from others should be targeted the same way.

Thus vv. 3-7, coupled with vv. 8-11 as a rationale explaining the specific θλίψις experienced by Paul and Timothy, set up the introduction of the letter for the reader / listener to anticipate much greater details especially regarding this rich perspective on ministry and service that the apostle depicts here. Second Corinthians should be mandatory reading and comprehension for every person called to ministry in the service of Christ. And this means every one of us as believers.