

2 Corinthians 1

by John Nelson Darby

In this sermon, John Nelson Darby explores Paul's letter to the Corinthians, emphasizing the themes of comfort in suffering and the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3

Topics: "Comfort in Trials", "New Creation in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, emphasizing the apostle's deep concern for the church amidst their struggles and his own tribulations. Paul, having faced severe persecution in Ephesus, writes to encourage the Corinthians, reminding them of their identity as saints and the comfort found in God. He highlights the transformative truth of being dead to sin and alive in Christ, urging the believers to embrace their new creation status. The sermon also touches on the significance of the Holy Spirit as a seal and earnest of the promises of God, reinforcing the believers' security in their relationship with Christ. Darby illustrates how Paul's experiences and teachings reflect the profound grace and mercy of God in the life of a believer.

Transcript

Paul was at Ephesus, intending to go to Corinth, but they were in such a bad state there that he could not go, but he wrote a letter, and then went up from Ephesus to Troas, in hope to meet Titus with an answer to his letter. He went into Macedonia, met Titus, and wrote them the second letter, now that his heart could open out more upon blessing. He could go farther on in the truth now, though they were still babes, yet he could lead them on.

Paul could go much nearer to Ephesian truth here, and we have the basis of that in a verse or two, though he does not enter into it as the unfolding of God's counsels. As regards the person of the Christian, it is, "If one died for all, then were all dead"; that is Ephesian truth as a basis in the individual. "Bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" is Roman truth, which is much beyond the first epistle; but his mouth is opened and enlarged. In Ephesians he gives the counsels of God, but here he can take the foundation in Christians. And here there was another thing had happened which gave occasion to this; he had gone through the terrible persecutions at Ephesus when the town clerk dismissed the assembly (and he seems, indeed, to have gone farther than we have details of in Acts), so that he despaired of his life. He had been through this which had brought him to the point of all that he sets out in the second epistle - that life was in God who raised the dead, and the flesh was dead. That is Roman truth - dead with Christ; but there are

two ways in which men are looked at - as living in sins, or living to sin, if you please; and on the other hand as dead in sins. It is the same state, but in two different aspects. If I look at a man living in his lusts and pleasures, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, then he is both living in sins and dead to God. I may take him up on either side, and say, You are a living man in sins, and you must die: or I may take him up as dead in sins, and say, Life is God's gift; and without it you cannot enjoy Him, or know Him, for you are dead. Death is brought to a living man in sin, and the new creature to a man that is dead. If the man is dead, as in Ephesians, we have all the counsels of God, a totally new creation of everything else, and of the man too, and that is here in Corinthians, not merely "he is a new creature" but there is (that is, the whole thing is) a new creation. You have the man practically realising death, and also as already dead, and the new creation brought in.

302 What I have indicated is the main thought of the epistle, and then we hear afterwards about collections of money. It is addressed more specifically to the saints. In the first epistle there is instruction for the whole of professing Christendom, and governmental directions how to get on. Here he is thinking of the saints, and opens his heart: it is to the saints which are in all Achaia, where Corinth was situated. The word "saints" looks at them as to their standing. Sanctified of the Spirit is always assumed to be a real thing, although there may be a false person amongst those so spoken of. I do not think the word "saint" is ever used, except upon the supposition that they are really so. Sanctified by the truth is like it, but not sanctified by blood as in Hebrews 10. It is not the individual himself sanctified by the Holy Ghost in such cases. See in Hebrews, "hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing." There was positive apostasy from that kind of sanctification, and yet he there speaks to them as sanctified. The true value of the sacrifice is not only to fit them for God, but to set them apart for God. It is like the word calling: "many are called, but few are chosen."

The apostle addresses them here as the "church of God"; in Romans there is no recognised church: there was a church assembled there, but he was dealing about individual justification; he had never been at Rome so as to recognise the church. In Thessalonians it is "the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father." They had just come out of idolatry, and there was but one God, and He was God the Father. Here it is ecclesiastical rather, the church of God; he is dealing with God's assembly in the world. For the same reason he says to Timothy, "the church of the living God," and tells him how he ought to behave himself there: he adds "living," in contrast with dumb and dead idols.

We get hold of the starting-point of this epistle in seeing that God had comforted Paul by the coming of Titus, after all his troubles at Ephesus, and about Corinth too. When he reached Macedonia, "without were fightings, within were fears"; and then comes Titus, and that is where he is in this epistle. He had gone through all at Ephesus, and at the same time had the pressure of the Corinthian state on his heart, and not only their state, but sorrow that he had ever written the first epistle at all, because he was afraid he had alienated the Corinthians from him. And he was now "joyed" by the coming of Titus.

303 He sets out God as "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, 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." (Read also v. 5-7.) Then, in verse 8, he begins with the circumstances we were referring to in Asia, but says "we had the sentence of death in ourselves"; he was almost put to death, but God did not allow him to be killed, and this met a man who held himself to be dead already. The sentence of death was written on him, and he held himself dead in himself, so that his confidence was not in any life he had as a man, but it was in God who raiseth the dead. It was the carrying out of Romans 6:11: "Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin," that was counting himself so. We have three

things: God sees us as dead; ye are dead; live it. Faith says, I reckon myself dead; Paul was doing so, and is made to carry it out. In Romans he applies it to sin, but here it is to everything. His confidence is in God, and God did deliver him, and did not allow him to be killed, though he feared it. Verse 11 refers to the part all the saints had in the power of deliverance that was with him. It is a remarkable expression, "The gift bestowed upon us through the prayers of many persons." This was at Ephesus.

The country called Asia in Scripture is proconsular Asia, the south-western corner of Asia Minor. I do not know that all Icaria was taken in. Then above that was Bithynia, and Cappadocia, and Galatia, and Armenia, and so on. I do not know that it was quite down to the sea in the south, but near the south-western corner. I would take in Lydia too. When he says, "All they that be in Asia," that is the portion spoken of. Ephesus was a great centre then, where was the temple of Artemis or Diana, "that all the world worshipped," one of the seven wonders of the world.

As to the general use of the Greek word in verse 4, "encouragement" is better than "comfort"; but it is the word for "exhort, and comfort, and encourage": it means to stir up our hearts.

304 "The sufferings of Christ abound in us" (v. 5) means sufferings the same in character; as in Colossians he says, "I fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ." The Head had suffered, and Paul was suffering too for the elect's sake, and doing so in the sphere that was given him. And you can see by their prayers they were all interested in what Paul had from God; they enjoyed it too, though the thing was bestowed upon him: just as we do now when praying for a brother in his labour. "Filling up that which is behind" signifies that there was more to be done. The Head had done His part, of course: Paul's was not atonement. I think this was confined to the apostle Paul. Peter and the rest never suffered for the church, though they suffered for Christ's sake, but Paul suffered from the Jews, which Peter never did. Paul was a minister of the gospel to the whole creation which is under heaven, and a minister of the church to complete the word of God; and this is not said of anybody else, it is Paul especially. I do not say that we ought not to suffer, for we ought; but a dispensation was committed to Paul, and we could not say this. We may have our share in the privilege, as some great banker takes up a large loan, and other people take up bits of it. All that take under him have their share.

The gift bestowed in verse 11 was his life spared, though I do not doubt it was all that he had as an apostle included.

Then Paul gives what I was saying about his journey round the Aegean sea. "In this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that you might have a second benefit, 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," v. 15, 16. Paul thought to have gone up the west side of the Aegean to Macedonia, and then to have come down the west side again, whereas he did not do so, but came down the east side of the Archipelago again. He says it was to spare them that he did not go to Corinth; if he had gone, it must have been "with a rod." But when Titus came, he heard it was all right, or at least in the main. Now here we have an instance of what we see in Paul: the instant he touches a certain string, off he goes on that string. His mind was so full of Christ, that, if he touches that, he goes away into it all; it is so here. He mentions Christ, and away he is into a whole range of truth in Him. This would not, however, have been so appropriate in the first epistle. "Our word," he says, "was not yea and nay; for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us was not yea and nay, but yea is in him; for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us," v. 19, 20.

305 Paul says it was not lightness, nor was it uncertainty, but it was to spare them he came not as yet unto Corinth, and he wrote to them instead of going. He says, "not yea and nay," not changing, not the lightness of a mere foolish human mind. In 1 Corinthians 16:5 he says, "I will come unto you when I shall pass through Macedonia"; this was that they might have a second benefit; and in verse 7 he adds, "for I will not see you now by the way," only he did not tell them why just then. He had intended to go by Corinth into Macedonia, and come back again by them, but he says, I will not do that now, so he says in chapter 16. He had intended, and then did not go. And here he asks, "Did I use lightness?" No, it was another thing.

In verse 20 "the promises" are all made to Christ, and not directly to the church. There are promises by the way, such as, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"; but all the promises in chief are to Christ. There never was a promise to a man, that is, a sinner, because the first thing that was said for faith to hang upon was a judgment passed upon the serpent; but it was Christ (the Seed of the woman) who was to bruise the serpent's head. There was no promise to fallen Adam, and had he been unfallen, he would not have wanted a promise. It was a revelation of the last Adam to which his faith could cling, but it was no promise to himself. In judging the serpent God says, "Thou shalt bruise his heel" (the heel of the woman's Seed); but "the Seed of the woman shall bruise thy head." The Seed of the woman is Christ, not Adam. The promise in Christ, in Ephesians 3, is everything that God has promised, eternal life, and especially the Spirit, "that ye might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." And then everything else is thus involved in Christ. Promise is an abstract idea, which takes a form as may be needed - bruising the serpent's head; promise of eternal life given is in Christ Jesus before the world began. and so on. There is no promise to the Gentiles. There is a revelation made to the Gentiles about them, as, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people"; or, "The promise is unto you and your children, and to them that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call": but all is in Christ. There is to the ten tribes; and many statements are made about them in the abundance of revelation. "Afar off," both in Acts and Ephesians 2, leaves it open. The apostle seizes the word "whosoever" in Acts 2, and gives it to Gentiles, or anybody else. He often takes up a word, and gives it a larger application than it had originally. The apostle does not himself apply it to the Gentiles in Acts 2, but, while it is quite true that Peter had the Jews and the ten tribes in his mind then, yet in the mind of the Spirit of God it embraces Gentiles also.

306 In Galatians the promises to Abraham were to Christ and to Christ only: that is the whole of the apostle's argument. There were two classes of promises and all go with Abraham. Abraham is the beginning of promise. If we go back a little, there were no dealings of God before the flood. He turned man out of the garden, if that can be called a dealing, but nothing between that and the flood. Then when God brings in the new world, in Noah He brings in government to restrain man; there is the power of the sword. After this, that it might be understood all was pure grace, God begins with promise. In the flood judgment came in; and thereupon the devil comes in and says, I govern the world, and men take up their idols. Well, God divided the world into nations and Abraham becomes the root of God's ways, and we find promises, election, and calling.

Abraham is the root of the olive tree: the promises are given to him; he is the elect and called one. And God gives the principle of all divine life, faith. Notice that, because people say, Had not God Himself settled all these things already? I say, Yes, because when He settled them, He called me out of them, to go out by faith: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy fathers, unto a land that I will shew thee." - I had formed this world into nations, it has gone to idolatry and taken the devil for its god, and now you must come out and belong to Me. Well, he left his country and kindred, but not his father's

house, and therefore he did not get to Canaan then, but after his father's death he went to Canaan. And Abraham was the first person who was the head of a family; Adam was the head of an evil race, man. We find plenty of saints, but no heads; but Abraham was to be father of the faithful. And it is then that God calls out this distinct person to be a stranger and sojourner.

307 There were two classes of promises; that a great nation should spring from him and his seed, to be as the stars of heaven (that is not "thy seed," or one). But in Genesis 12, God says, "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed," that is not Israel. Then we find that promise confirmed in chapter 22. It is never said, "to thee" and thy seed, "to Abraham," but "in thee." But when Isaac had been offered up and been received in resurrection, then he says in Galatians, "to Abraham and to his seed were the promises made." Genesis 12 gave it to Abraham, and Genesis 22 confirmed it, to the Seed. The promise is made to Abraham personally in chapter 12, and confirmed to the seed, Isaac, in chapter 22, and that is a figure in which Christ had died and risen. That was confirmed to Christ (but not in Christ), and the law which came later on could not disannul or add to it. Hence therefore you cannot bring in the law now; law cannot be tacked on to promise. Then you see there was only one Seed, and that is Christ, and then he adds, If I am in Christ, I have the promise That is the way he brings the Gentile in. The Jews were the natural seed, but he says, the promise of the blessing was to the one person, Christ. Very well, I am in Christ, then I have the promise; "If ye be in Christ, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise."

It is not a promise to the Gentiles, but one confirmed to Christ and then to the Gentiles in Christ, through the Spirit. Genesis 15 is specific to the Jews, and in Genesis 22 is promise to the seed. The stars of heaven are the Jews only, as Moses says, "Behold ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude," Deut. 1. It is a great thing to see what the Lord is pointing out in a passage. And He takes two illustrations of a great number - what we see in the heavens, and what lies on the sea-shore.

Some people think that the law was added to recover Israel afterwards. But this was not a thought common to Paul. What he says is, You cannot add the law. And we find another thing (which is what such would say still more); that is, they add grace to the law, and try to get out that way. This is exactly what they had at Sinai; they broke the law then and there, and God spared them by grace and put them back under law. The first time Moses went up the mount, he did not put a covering over his face, and it is then he finds the people round the calf, and that they had broken the law fundamentally before they had it, that is, before they had it in full; though they had undertaken to be obedient to the Lord, they had gone aside from Him already. Still God spares them in His government, and in answer to Moses says, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book"; but He brings them back under law, and it was the ministration of death and condemnation mingled with forbearance, which is not absolute law, but law mixed with grace.

308 The first time the law was given on the tables of stone, it never reached them at all. Moses broke them. You could not put the law by the side of the golden calf. Moses did not know what to do with the tables. He had not asked God about it, at least I always thought so, it was his righteous indignation. "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing, and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount." God could not break His law, of course, but man could not have it. They never did have pure law, therefore; but when he went up the second time, God shews Himself in His proclamation before him: "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, and longsuffering," etc., and the people who were spared are put back under law, though grace accompanies its application to them.

Moses put the veil on whenever he came out: that was to keep the glory on. There is no veil on the glory now; the glory could not come out then, for glory with law is death and condemnation. Now, the veil is entirely off in Christ, because the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, after He has been on the cross, is the proof of salvation. And therefore now I can look at it and be changed into the same image. The veil is off the glory and on their hearts - Israel's - and not on the glory; but when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil that is on their heart shall go also. All the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, is promised, everything about Christ that was told in the Old Testament; but there is added here another thing, it is only through the Holy Ghost. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." That brings in an immense element. In Exodus 24 the covenant was sanctioned by death; if it is law, it is death and condemnation; if characterised by death, it is salvation. The blood was to confirm the covenant; but if it is a covenant of law, it confirms it to condemn me: if it is a covenant of grace it confirms it to save me.

309 Well, all these promises of God are yea and amen, to God's glory; but it is "by us"; we are brought in, and then He shews how it is. "He which establisheth us with you in Christ and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." It is this security we get established in Christ by God who seals us with the Spirit. The sealing is an additional thing which is by the anointing. "Unction" is the same as "anointing"; it is exceedingly beautiful, and an additional instance of the way in which Christ has associated us with Himself. It is Christ's own anointing is the testimony to our being baptised by the Holy Ghost: "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost; and I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God." The way that we get the Holy Ghost brought into us is that Christ received it. He is the Lamb of God that takes away sin; and the other element in John's testimony to Him is, that He baptised with the Holy Ghost.

There is another thing to be remembered here: Christ received the Holy Ghost, consequent upon His work being finished. "Being by the right hand of God exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now hear and see." Christ being perfect, God puts His seal upon Him: "Jesus of Nazareth anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power." Then comes in redemption, and consequent upon that He receives of the Father the Holy Ghost for us. This makes it a heavenly thing for us, for it unites us with Him while He is there, and that is the reason we have assurance. Christ is gone, and the question is, "Is His blood accepted?" The Jews cannot tell this till He come out; but we do not wait for that, because the Holy Ghost has come out, and having come He unites me with Christ who is there. We have a figure of it in Leviticus 9. Moses and Aaron went in, and came out and blessed the people, and so God testified His acceptance of the sacrifice. But we do not wait for that. While Christ has gone in as a heavenly Lord, the Holy Ghost has come out, Christ gone up on high receives the promise of the Father and sends Him down. God puts us into Christ, and gives the Holy Ghost, and the consciousness of being in Christ, and that is the sealing. And I have the earnest of the Spirit in my heart, which, to complete it, means that I am going to have the glory.

310 Baptism of the Spirit and anointing agree in substance, except that one thinks of anointing as more of active continuance. Sealing and anointing are coincident again in a sense, but that sealing is personal, and anointing has a more general bearing. When anointed I can say God has put His seal upon me for the day of redemption. And there is more; for not only does the Holy Ghost seal me and give me title, but He is the earnest of the inheritance too, and in me as such. Sealing is prominent among us, because we want

security, and to be sure of it, and we have that by this one fact, that the Holy Ghost is given to us in this way, consequent upon Christ's sitting at the right hand of God. In the Old Testament the leper was washed with water, sprinkled with blood, and anointed with oil. In the case of the priests, the oil and the blood were mingled. It was put on the tip of the right ear, and thumb of right hand, and great toe of right foot. The blood of Christ is applied to all our thoughts, acts, and walk; and then the anointing oil follows, the Spirit to sanctify all my thoughts, acts and walk; and then beside the oil was poured on his head, the whole man as such anointed.

The sprinkling of the blood in 1 Peter 1:2 is used with reference to salvation. There is never re-sprinkling of the blood. There is the sprinkling of the blood of the covenant (the covenant sealed), and the leper sprinkled, and the priest sprinkled; but there is no re-sprinkling. In Numbers 19 when a man had to be restored, the ashes were put into running water, and then he was sprinkled with it. The Spirit of God brought to remembrance what the blood had done in putting away sin long ago. For a ground of communion, the blood was always there before God, seven times sprinkled. The ashes were brought, to say, Sin was dealt with long ago: how came you to defile yourself, forgetting that you were purged? Leviticus is the book of the offerings, but we have this in Numbers as it applied to our path and journeyings.

311 In "sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood," we are sanctified to the obedience and blood-sprinkling of Christ; and Christ's obedience is not what we are apt to think of as obedience, but in its nature quite different from legal obedience, because the law of God meets a will of mine and says, You must not do this or that. But Christ says, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." And in Christ's obedience the will of the Father was His motive. Suppose my child was anxious to run out and see the judges come in, and I say, Sit down and do your lesson; and he then does so cheerfully. This is all well, but Christ never obeyed in that way. He had no will of His own to be first stopped. I have a will, and it is obedience, when it is checked, to stop. The only apparent case of anything of the kind in Christ was when wrath was coming in, and in itself He could not desire that; yet He adds, "not my will but thine be done." In ourselves we never ought to do anything, except because it is positively God's will. In the passage, the object is put first, and the blood sprinkling next.

"Sanctify and cleanse it," in Ephesians 5:26, is when evil has come in, you must have it judged; you must have cleansing then. Christ was sanctified, He set Himself apart; but Adam had not thought of that in the garden. It is absolute as regards the person, and progressive as regards the state. The moment I have a new nature, I am absolutely set apart to God. In Ephesians the order of it is as if I were to say, "he cured me of that fault, having beaten me."

"Having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost" means having received it for us. Christ received the Holy Ghost a second time. It was anointing in glory. The baptism of the Holy Ghost took place at Pentecost; then in Acts 11 it is only an analogy to shew that God would have the Gentiles as well as the Jews: nor do you get baptism spoken of there. They do not say in Acts 19, "we have not heard whether there is any Holy Ghost": for every Jew knew that; but it is "whether the Holy Ghost yet is," pointing to a coming of the Spirit, the time of which they were ignorant.

The Spirit Himself is the earnest, the pledge of the possession. Sealing is the act of giving the Spirit. I put a seal on a document, and that is the same idea. The anointing was putting oil on a man's head, and it is the general fact that the oil is put there, but the sealing is the effect on the individual. If I say at a coronation, "The queen is anointed," it is a simple fact, but that fact secures her there as queen. The

anointing is a great deal more than the sealing.

312 John says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things," and yet he is going on teaching them still. The babe in Christ, having this anointing, knows his security, but that does not hinder the apostle from teaching him all the while. The promises of God are in Christ to God's glory, and "by us," and the way they are by us is that God has fixed us firm in Christ, and has also given us the anointing, and has sealed us; and this same Holy Ghost, who is the seal, is the earnest of the things I am sealed for. The earnest shews the present relationship settled, and gives the enjoyment of God's love, and I know my relationship with the Father as a child; but I have not an atom of the inheritance, only the earnest yet.

The Holy Spirit will never leave the heirs. We have a testimony that we shall not lose the Holy Spirit in Acts 1 where it says that through the Holy Spirit Christ gave commandments to His apostles, after His resurrection. He had not lost the Holy Spirit as a man by rising; and that brought me to a very blessed and happy thought, because now it is something like the steam in an engine, where half the force is lost in making the engine go, but when I get to heaven there will be no such difficulty to contend with.

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