

2Cor 26-10-11b

We pick up our study here in 2 Corinthians, looking at this sentence of death that Paul talks about, and the term that is used there, the sentence, actually means something along the lines of a legal verdict, and so there have been speculations on what this was. I'm not going to delve into that. There are pages of ideas that he was sentenced to death and somehow delivered, that it has something to do with the riot over Diana of the Ephesians that is recorded in Acts chapter 19.

You can review that without Demetrius, the silversmith. He makes these objects of worship for Diana, and they come out and a riot ensues. It could be the beasts at Ephesus that he spoke of in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 32.

Paul says, If in the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Once again, he makes the connection in 1 Corinthians 15 of the resurrection to the power of God that can be at work in our lives on a daily basis. We tend to forget how important that truth is, that doctrine is, but that God holds the power of life and death isn't just the hope of resurrection after we and our loved ones pass away, it is the fact that he has kept us alive and is keeping us alive in the present when we don't need to be.

We're reminded of this occasionally when a potentially dangerous situation crops up. I was like the apostle Paul after his shipwreck. I was bitten in the hand by a snake yesterday.

Not to worry, all is well, it wasn't a poisonous snake. But as you look down at your hand and see a snake head with its fangs buried in your finger and its body wrapped around your arm, which actually was an encouragement, this is an aside, but one of the ways you know it's a rat snake and not a water moccasin is, rat snakes are constrictors, as are king snakes, and if you do get bit by one they will try to wrap themselves around you and crush you to death like a mouse, not realizing that you're substantially larger and you can't kill me by squeezing my hand. But it is a sobering sight to see a snake wrapped around your arm with its fangs buried in your hand, and there was no danger.

My heart rate didn't rise, I knew it was a rat snake, I was not alarmed. But it is a reminder of our mortality, and we are here by God's grace. And if we are here, there is a purpose.

Could have been a different kind of snake, but it wasn't, because God's not ready to take me home yet. Chances are you'd survive a snake bite to the appendages anyway, but the thought does arise. It is a helpful reminder that we are here by God's grace, and that grace always has a purpose.

That's what Paul is talking about here when he says that he was delivered in verse 10 from so great a death, kind of an odd turn of phrase, much has been written about it, so great a death. So menacing a death is one translation, that this would have been a great detriment, not just to Paul

personally, but to the presentation of the word of God in that region. If he had been paraded and publicly executed in some fashion, if it had been shown that the civil authorities and the silversmiths and others in Ephesus could run someone out of town, shout someone down, and have them executed, or stoned to death, or whatever other means, this would be detrimental to the cause of Christ.

Paul is preserved, and this is a manifestation, it is a demonstration of God's grace and God's power. So as I said, Paul is going to elaborate on this life and death theme when we get to chapter 5, talking about the earthly house and what it will be replaced with and replaced by. He will give us another reminder of his experience of suffering in chapter 12, verses 8 and 9, the thorn in the flesh.

But here, this is a reminder to the Corinthians that not only may they share in hardship and persecution as it is emblematic in the life and ministry of Paul, but more importantly, partake of the consolation, the encouragement. That's really the thrust of this entire section, as you see by reading it a few times over. You also helping together in prayer for us in verse 11, Paul remembers that God acts through the prayers of his people.

In some cases, although God is able and willing to provide or to intervene, he will delay and he will wait to give us the opportunity to ask. This helps us not take his intervention for granted. This is a part of the doctrine of prayer that even though God needs, God knows our needs before we express them, he will wait for us to express them.

And this is similar to what he says in Philippians 1.19, I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ. You can look at the context there in Philippians 1, but my deliverance comes through your prayer. This reminds us of the fellowship, of the entwined lives that we lead with fellow believers and the opportunity to intercede and to be a part of both the sufferings and the triumphs of this life.

The fellowship of suffering and the fellowship of comfort is in view when we pray for one another. There is another example of this in 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 1-3, Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

Just as we should not lose sight of the central place God's power of resurrection holds, in the initial communication of the gospel and our ongoing life in its light, the importance of the resurrection and the importance of prayer, intercessory prayer, to pray effectively, we know something about what we pray. We can apply our personal experience, we can imagine what someone else may be going through, and we can pray effectively. The older you are, the more effective a prayer warrior you can be, because you've been there.

Not just the circumstantial details, we are aware of how it feels. We have walked through that aforementioned valley of the shadow ourselves. We have experienced and suffered these hardships, difficulties, challenges, and we have a unique perspective in being able to pray for others who are now facing that same challenge.

The value that Paul sets on these supplications by those that are in the churches is given in the consequence that he describes here. You helping together in prayer for us, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through the many. There is a shared appreciation for God and a shared expression of thanksgiving to Him.

It unites us. We travel together, as it were, through these hardships. And the Corinthians and the Thessalonians and the Laodiceans and others who are supporters of Paul's work, not only financially, but in prayer, are also blessed in the answer to that prayer.

And it draws us closer together. It draws us closer to God. This is a good thing.

Unity is a big part of the theme of the previous letter to the Corinthians. So then we pick up in verse 12 here, For our boasting is this. And notice the for there is tying this to the previous context.

For our boasting is this. The testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God and more abundantly toward you. Just think about that verse.

Paul says what we celebrate. This is not boasting in the negative sense. Our celebration.

What we want to talk about and toast in the figurative sense is this. Most toasts that are given at weddings or other cases of celebration are this kind of boasting. The boast is a toast.

A celebration, a lifting up of a positive thing. Here, our boasting is this. The testimony of our conscience.

We conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity. Simplicity and godly sincerity. Isn't this something we would hope to celebrate about ourselves, just as Paul does? That our conscience, having been rehabilitated by the word of God.

How many times have we referred back to our study of conscience? It's that thing inside that tells us what we're doing is right, is valuable, is legitimate, and it often tells us wrongly that we are right. People are sure they're right because their conscience tells them so, but their conscience is lying. And there's nothing worse than the heart deceiving itself.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and in its unregenerate state, in its unrepaired state, faulty. So, we celebrate our boasting is the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world. This would be a verse to think about as we spend our days interacting with the world,

those around us, getting things done, being a part of larger efforts, looking at what is going on in the world.

Can we celebrate our conscience, our consciousness of having conducted ourselves properly in the world? Simplicity and godly sincerity. You think about what that means. We're going to see it coming up in chapter four, verse two.

Paul says, we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Again, in this opening chapter, Paul is sowing the seeds of things that he will elaborate later. The hardships and sufferings, the comfort that comes in the midst of those will be elaborated later.

This new idea, the testimony of our conscience in how we conducted ourselves, will be explored. We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, making the truth visible, communicating it, making it real, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Notice, Paul's conscience here testifies, it is going to be recognized by the conscience of others when we get to chapter four.

This is the part of fellowship. This is the part of contact with other people. We have to be rehabilitated inside first.

We have to be operating out of a good conscience, a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, as we saw in Timothy. That then will be recognized by those who are of good conscience, and there is a mutual blessing. There is mutual encouragement.

This is how our fellowship works. It's one thing to say, we need fellowship, we need contact, forsake not the assembling. What does it actually do? The testimony of a good conscience before God resonates with the good conscience in others, and there is a supernatural bond of peace.

There is a supernatural cooperation and kind of support that transcends distance, transcends time, and is unique to Christian fellowship. You will not find this kind of description and this kind of interaction described in the Old Testament. This is a church-age privilege, a church-age benefit that belongs to you and belongs to me, and it acts and it operates in our fellowship.

We'll see this again in 2 Corinthians 5.11. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, which he has talked about earlier, before this, we persuade men, but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. We are well known in your consciences. There is a connection between the rehabilitated and divinely enabled conscience, informed by the Word of God, filled with the Spirit, that connects us in a unique way.

It's immaterial. This isn't just reason and logic and persuasion and endless conversation. This is a

spiritual connection.

We are brothers and sisters in Christ. What is the fabric of that relationship? What is the fabric of that association? This is it. God works in our consciences, and now our consciences communicate.

They connect. They bind us together in a godly way. So, as I say, you could put 2 Corinthians 4.2 and 5.11 out by the margin here in 1.12. They will be able to participate in their prayer, in their understanding of what Paul has been called to do and how he has been called to do it.

And you'll see this in passages like Romans 15.19 that Paul speaks of his ministry. Verse 17, we talked about the boasting in 2 Corinthians 1. Romans 15.17, Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God, for I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me in word and deed to make the Gentiles obedient in mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and roundabout to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, and I make it my aim to preach it even beyond those he will go on to say. But in Romans 15, he says, you go back a verse or two, Nevertheless, brethren, verse 15, I have written more boldly to you on some points, reminding you because of the grace given to me by God.

Paul has grace. He has a clear conscience in communicating what that grace reveals. I've written boldly to you on some points, reminding you because of the grace given to me by God that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God so that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable.

This is the presentation of people as a sanctified offering to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I have reason to glory, and so on. Wonderful parallel passage there to the thought in Romans chapter 15.

The sincerity, the simplicity and sincerity that he talks about here, he is going to pick up again in chapter two, verse 16 and 17. And speaking of this, we are in verse 15 to God, the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. There are two categories.

Those who are being saved, Paul has a ministry of teaching, of endeavoring to bring them to maturity in Christ. Those who are unsaved, of introducing them to Christ and bringing them to salvation. We are to God, the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

To the one, we are the aroma of death, leading to death. The wages of sin is death. The end of this life, for those who are not saved by grace through faith, is death.

The aroma of death. To the other, the aroma of life, leading to life. Who is sufficient for these

things? We are not as so many, peddling the word of God, but as of sincerity, as from God.

We speak in the sight of God, in Christ. Sincerity. We don't do this to see how well it's going to go over with the audience.

We're not doing it to impress or to gain support or approbation. We do it as unto the Lord, as of sincerity, as from God. We speak in the sight of God, in Christ.

So next to that godly sincerity in chapter 1, verse 12, you can put chapter 2, verse 17. And this should be the way we live our lives. As unto the Lord.

Let your moderation be known to all, Paul says in another place. The Lord is at hand. He is present.

He's watching. I want him to be pleased in the way I handle myself. Those who are teachers are occasionally observed by supervisors.

I was an instructor in gunnery, and my supervisors, a few times per set, would come in and evaluate. How is Lieutenant Hull doing in presenting this material? Later I became a supervisor and the chief of the branch, and I would go visit. And you can't help, whether you are the observee or the observer, to recognize that the presence of an observer makes a difference.

Not quite as relaxed, not quite as seat of the pants. You pay close attention and be sure that what you are presenting is what is in the curriculum, what is in the learning objectives. Because there is a formal kind of evaluation.

This should be the way we live our lives, knowing that we are observed by God, and we want Him to be pleased. So we don't want to be casual or sloppy, inefficient, inaccurate. Remembering that what we do, we do as unto the Lord and not unto men, should make us better servants, better tools in God's hands to hold the sharp edge as He chisels away at things that need to be reshaped.

Godly sincerity and simplicity. It's not complicated. One of the helpful observations of Bible interpretation is that if you have to have a grasp of world history and the entire list of popes and persecutions and investigations and the kinds of suffering and hardship and persecution that have gone on, if you need to know those things in order to interpret Scripture, if you have to have a historical background or an extensive linguistic background in order to understand the Scripture, that is not going to be the understanding.

There is simplicity in Christ. This simplicity doesn't mean you're simple, as in not smart. It means that it's not complicated.

It is near us. It is in our hearts. It is graspable.

It's usable. It's applicable in a fairly straightforward way. I would say straightforward is what this means.

It's not convoluted. It doesn't have to be argued on how many angels dance on the head of a pin. There's a simplicity in Christ and a simplicity in the message, both to unbelievers.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt be saved. Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus. Believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead.

You'll be saved. It's not complex. And we should not be complex and go into extensive arguments and detailed rebuttals and lengthy excursions into the esoteric when talking about the Word of God.

If it is going to be meaningful and if it is going to be helpful, it is going to be simple. So it's great to have a background. It's great to have a teacher who can go sift through all of the esoterica.

But when it comes to the presentation of the message, and this is the hope of every teacher of the Word of God who recognizes the importance of that function, keep it simple. Is this something I can apply? There are dead seas of ink that are spilled on what phase of Paul's ministry was it? What was the nature of the death sentence? It doesn't matter. There was a threat.

And God's grace, via the prayers of people who knew about it and supported Him, sustained Him and kept Him alive. Simple. So the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God and more abundantly toward you.

There is a lot of fleshly wisdom on the internet. There is a lot of fleshly wisdom being put forward in pulpits, in the venues of what is called Christian counseling. Christian counseling is good if it is truly Christian, i.e. biblical.

But to try to amalgamate Jung and Freud and Skinner and other psychologists and endeavoring to figure out the difference between your right lobe and your left lobe and your amygdala, that is not simplicity that is in Christ. There is a straightforward appeal to the Word of God. That is what is the sharp sword.

That is what cuts to the heart of the soul and the spirit, the joints and the marrow, the thoughts and intents of the heart. We go to a doctor when we break a limb or we suffer an injury. God doesn't say, read your Bible and your physical injuries will be fixed.

But when it comes to our thought life, our conscience, our motivations, our intentions, our purposes, our conscience in particular, this is the realm God claims for Himself. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusts in Thee. Perfect peace.

This is a mental condition. Thoughts and intents of the heart. This is in our mentality, in the realm

of the immaterial.

And in the same way that evangelism shouldn't elbow the Holy Spirit out of the way when Scripture says that it is the Holy Spirit that convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us an awareness of sin. It is the Holy Spirit that communicates our prayers back and forth to God the Father.

That is the Spirit's realm. And we don't elbow Him out of the way. And we do not elbow God out of the way when there are difficulties in our thought life.

Only to the extent that there are physical problems. If you are in constant pain because of a broken bone and you can't think straight because you are in terrible pain, go to the doctor and get the thing set and splinted and on the road to healing. There are those who, for various reasons, have afflictions that can affect the way they think.

And there will be provision in the physical realm for problems that are rooted in the physical realm. But when we have spiritual issues, that is the realm of spiritual resources. So, that said, you have understood us in part, verse 14, that we are your boast as you are also ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.

This connection of conscience, this prayer for one another, is going to be something that comes up in the day of the Lord Jesus. And it will not be an embarrassment. It will not be ashamed at His coming.

It will be a boast. It's the opposite of shame at His coming. It is celebration at His coming.

Lord, look at the quality of our fellowship, at the durability of our love, and care for one another. You know how we have prayed for one another and have seen the grace of God flow into these circumstances as a group, as multiple individuals, cause for celebration in the day of Christ. That brings us then to verse 15.

In this confidence, I intended to come to you so that you might have a second benefit, a second blessing, to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? The things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes, and no, no? That is a completely obscure reference that we'll look at next time. But notice the influence on Paul's plans.

He is not planning according to the flesh. He is planning according to spiritual need, spiritual opportunity. And this is something that we can work into our own calculations.

Thanksgiving is coming up. Where are we going to spend it? Christmas is coming up. Where are we going to spend it? Will we be with people? Will people be with us? These are traditional family gatherings.

Thanksgiving has its roots in recognizing God's grace for sustaining provision and so on. Thinking back over the previous year and rehearsing God's blessings, are the plans, who's got the biggest house? Who can afford the turkey? Or are these decisions based on the spiritual? Well, we did it in so-and-so's house last time, so we should do it at the opposite person's house this time. If that is the only calculation, we're not really conformed to this way of thinking.

Paul is making travel plans, and in the ancient world, the nature of travel was such that this is a critical decision. It's not as simple as catching the next plane, or waiting a day to drive somewhere. These were major undertakings that required money and time and effort to cover distances that we give no thought to in our day of technology.

But Paul says, this confidence, the connection we have, the celebration we have in our interaction and in our mutual support, even in days of dire hardship and the threat of death, that celebration influences Paul's plans. Does our spiritual set of priorities, our spiritual goals, our spiritual values, our opportunities to be blessed and to be a blessing amongst believers of like mind, does that affect our decisions? Obviously, it affected decisions we have assembled here this morning out of recognition that it is important to do so, that it makes a difference. It pleases God and it encourages other believers just to be present, just to be reminded and to pray as new things come up, celebrate and give thanks for things that God has addressed and resolved, give God credit and thanksgiving for the hardships that face us, knowing that He's working them together for good because we love Him and we recognize our calling.

It is essential that we make our decisions in the realm of the world in the light of who we are in Christ that has to be a consideration in every decision making process and this is the example here in this confidence verses 12 through 14 I intended to come to you before that you might have another benefit that you would be blessed to pass by way of you to Macedonia and to come again from Macedonia to you. I'm going to hit you on the way out, I'm going to hit you on the way back and be helped by you on my way to Judea I come to you hopefully to confer a blessing I come back to you in hopes that you can confer a blessing on me as I head to Judea. That's going to be a time of testing you know what happens with the men from James and those that come from Jerusalem therefore verse 17 when I was planning this did I do it lightly or the things I plan do I plan according to the flesh you could write this on a card and stick it on the mirror to be looked at in the morning.

The plans I have for this day, have I made them strictly according to the flesh or am I doing the things that are necessitated by existence in the world the way I do them the spirit in which I do them the purposes for which I do them have a connection to my identity in Christ and my fellowship with other believers it's a factor I don't do it lightly I do what I do as unto the Lord, I do what I do recognizing that the Lord will use it in the lives of other believers and the Lord will use the lives of other believers in my own life we need to constantly remind ourselves of the importance of our existence as the body of Christ, not individual organisms the whole difference

between single celled life and complex life, multicellular life, how did it arise, this is one of the things evolution can't answer to be organized into a body that is mutually beneficial and self-sustaining, that's our calling in Christ so that should be a consideration as we follow Paul's example we'll pick up here next time in verse 17 what does it mean that there should be yes yes and no no and as God is faithful our word to you was not yes and no what is going on that will be a fresh line of investigation that we will pick up next time we'll close here in a word of prayer thank you for the truth of your word our heavenly father, we thank you for the grace that unites us that enables us to be of mutual benefit to be irreciprocal in our blessing and in our prayers, we pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us to see clearly those opportunities to function in that light and to enjoy that special grace that is unique to this age, we pray that in all things our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be glorified and we ask it in His name Amen