



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

5 - 10 JULY 2021

INTRODUCTION

This week we start a new series of readings from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. As usual the text in bold type gives a focus for the day's Thought.

MONDAY - 2 Corinthians 1:1-14

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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 to us through the prayers of many.

¹² Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more towards you. ¹³ For we write to you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end— ¹⁴ as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.

Thought for the day

After his initial greetings (v1-2), Paul immediately writes about consolation - about how it comes from God, so that not only are we ourselves consoled but we can share our consolation with others (v3-4). It sounds as though the church at Corinth and Paul himself had both been suffering (v6,8-9), probably from persecution in one form or another. That may not be the problem we face, but there are few indeed who never need to be consoled. As the well-known hymn, Make me a channel of your peace, puts it: 'And Master grant that I may never seek so much to be consoled as to console.' The ability to offer consolation rather than just sympathy should give Christians a great opportunity to offer something distinctive to others.

TUESDAY - 2 Corinthians 1:15-2:4

¹⁵ Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favour; ¹⁶ I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. ¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no' at the same time? ¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been 'Yes and No.' ¹⁹ **For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not 'Yes and**

No'; but in him it is always 'Yes.' ²⁰ **For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'** **For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God.** ²¹ But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, ²² by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment.

²³ But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth.

²⁴ I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

^{2.1} So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. ² For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? ³ And I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice; for I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you. ⁴ For I wrote to you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

Thought for the day

Paul appears to be replying to criticism (probably in a lost letter to him from the Corinthian church) that he kept changing his mind about visiting them. Notice how part of his response takes the form of a brief reflection on the character of Jesus (v19-20) in an unusual way - what does he mean by describing him as 'always Yes'? Perhaps the best way of understanding this is to think of Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophecies in the OT. Is Jesus the Messiah? - yes; is Jesus the Lord? - yes; is he the one God raised from the dead? - yes. And since this is so, our only response can be to say Amen - so be it, and to bless and praise God for the gift of Jesus. These are words to savour and to turn into our own prayer.

WEDNESDAY - 2 Corinthians 2:5-17

⁵ But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent—not to exaggerate it—to all of you. ⁶ This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; ⁷ so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. ¹¹ And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

¹² When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; ¹³ but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia.

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; ¹⁶ to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.

Thought for the day

Not only does there seem to have been a lost letter to Paul from Corinth, but also a lost response from Paul (see v4 yesterday). This correspondence appears to have dealt with someone within the Corinthian fellowship who had offended others by their behaviour and had been expelled. Now Paul writes of the need for forgiveness, consolation and love (v5-8). If they forgive, he too will forgive (v10), for not to forgive gives the devil purchase on our lives (v11). We need constant reminders that the forgiveness we need from God is linked in the Lord's prayer to the way we forgive others.

THURSDAY - 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

¹ Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; ³ and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. ⁵ Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷ Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸ how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! ¹⁰ Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹ for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory.

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. **¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.**

Thought for the day

In this passage Paul contrasts the beliefs of the Jewish people, centred on God's glory and the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (v3,7,9-11,13-15), with those of the followers of Christ revealed by the Holy Spirit (v3,8,16-18). Christ's Spirit brings freedom from the constraints of the Jewish law (v17); more than that, he gives us direct access to God and his glory (v18): the veil is taken away (v16, see also the similar idea directly associated with Jesus' death in Mark 15:38). This taking away of the veil should take our breath away as we consider how we can approach God directly, in ways inconceivable to the OT mindset, and all because of Jesus.

FRIDAY - 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

¹ Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹ For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹³ But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Thought for the day

Paul continues with the idea of the veil but changes it from the historical idea of yesterday's reading to the present reality of those who refuse to accept the truth of the good news about Jesus, taught

by Paul and his companions (v3-6). This Gospel proclamation comes from God, via the 'clay jars' of little regard (v7) - those who are afflicted, perplexed and persecuted (v8-10). In this they are precisely aligned with the suffering and death of Jesus and, like him, hold out the promise of new life in his name (v11), especially through new converts (v12). Paul's confidence rings out down the centuries - whatever life throws at us, we should not lose heart (v16) - far greater things lie ahead (v17-18).

SATURDAY - 2 Corinthians 5:1-21

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— ³ if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶ So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. **²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Thought for the day

Our readings started this week with a reminder of the Christian attribute of consolation. We end with another characteristic - reconciliation. We live in a society which is immensely confrontational and where clear injustices take decades of campaigning even to put partially right - think of Windrush, Hillsborough, and Post Office scandals, all recently in the news. In these and in many, many other smaller mistreatments we so badly need reconciliation rather than confrontation. God is the great reconciler (v19) who loved the world so much that he sent his only son Jesus Christ to save the world (John 3:16). But now he has to work through us in a world which remains fractured and uncompromising. We are his messengers, his ambassadors (v20), modelling reconciliation in our own lives, both to one another and to God. This is costly work - it may involve us in compromising cherished principles, of courting controversy and unpopularity, of constantly failing. But it is God's work and if we do it we will achieve something of God's own characteristic of righteousness (v21).