

Fully rely on God

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[0:00] as we look to God for his blessing this evening, shall we return to 2 Corinthians, and in chapter 1 we can reread verses 8 and 9. Verses 8 and 9, for we do not want you to be ignorant brothers of the affliction we experienced in Asia, for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed we felt we had received the sentence of death, but that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

Sometimes we may think it would have been such a wonderful experience to have lived in the first century at the time where the apostles were still living, just to see and maybe experience something of the power of the gospel that they had experienced themselves. God was so close, things were so evidently being carried forward by God, and we look at ourselves today and all around and we think how different it is. But despite the fact that things were very alive, spiritually speaking, there were at the same time many problems. Many problems, some of which might even shock us to think that they could be happening in a church at the same time as God's presence and power is so obviously active and at work. But that's the way it was in Corinth, and you may be familiar with the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Well, it's called 1 Corinthians. It's not actually the first letter he wrote to them. He wrote another letter that isn't part of the New Testament writings, but he wrote to them a letter prior to 1 Corinthians, and then he got a letter back with information about things that were happening in the church and also with some questions that some of the believers in Corinth had. And if you have a look in 1 Corinthians, being familiar with it already, some of you, maybe others aren't, you can be quite shocked to see just how many problems there actually were that Paul had to address. There were some, the nature of them are very, very incompatible with the Christian life in moral terms. There were also in terms of worship and even the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You'd think, how could it, how could anybody be living with and ministering with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and be making mistakes and getting things wrong? Surely, if God was at work like that, he would be controlling everything. Or the other hand, we might think, if people are claiming to be ministering in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they get things wrong, it can't be the Spirit. But if you look at 1 Corinthians and go through it, and please do, just to see where this is found, there's no time to try and reference these things. But what the apostle does is, he doesn't tell them to stop what they're doing because it's wrong, but he tells them to regulate it. He gives them guidance on how to regulate and how to put things right. So he guides them about how to deal with issues of church discipline, issues of worship, and he does so very severely in order to correct many of the problems. A divided congregation and so many issues underlying that these divisions were maybe just symptomatic of. But when you come to 2 Corinthians, where we are this evening, it's a very, very different note that's been struck in this letter.

It's one that's very personal. It's very, very much loaded with affection on Paul's part. He bears his heart to them. And it arguably, it may even be one of the most personal of his letters, where he just pulls the curtain back and he lets his heart bear to them. And that's with a view to showing them how much he actually loves them. Because Paul was someone who, from one angle, maybe thought or misunderstood to be quite an austere, down the line, hard-hearted man. You just do what you're told, get on with it. And we think, well, John, the apostle, on the other hand, was more of a loving, more of a kind, gentle, gracious person. He wasn't any different from Paul, however, in some ways.

You remember, himself and his brother were called by Jesus the sons of thunder. So they had a right, more than a spark in them. They had fire in them. And in that regard, John and Paul were very alike.

And also, in terms of love that John is renowned for, Paul was very like that as well. 2 Corinthians highlights that. And there's a bit of history in between the two letters that explains why the theme between 1st and 2nd Corinthians is so different. The first one, he's correcting this and that and everything else. The second one, he's comforting, he's reassuring, and he's encouraging. In between Paul's writing 1st Corinthians and 2nd Corinthians, he had sent Timothy to Corinth, his younger associate, and he was sent to find out how things were going, really to see had the letter that he wrote them been taken on board by them. It wasn't. And other events took place that led to Paul coming suddenly himself. If you come into chapter 2, we'll see what he says in verse 1. I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you, which means he had visited them, but it was a painful experience. What he met with was opposition, rejection, and rather than his letter being received, it was rejected. And he was being rejected. The man God had used to convert and turn their lives over to the Lord, they were now rejecting him.

[5 : 46] And there were multiple reasons for that. But it was painful for him. It was painful for them. So he's saying, the situation you were in, I decided not to come back to you, to leave you for the moment. And Titus, we gather, at one point had brought Paul information, a follow-up, since Paul had visited himself.

And the information Titus brought was very, very positive, because in the providence of God, with the grace of God, these people in Corinth actually took on board what Paul had said.

And that is why 2 Corinthians is written. And Paul is explaining, look, I was really severe in what I was saying, but I had to be. But in case you think that I was just being severe for the sake of it, he's saying, we're not those who lorded over your faith. He says that to them. But verse 4, chapter 2, I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, he's saying. The kind of man he was. He was broken. Because he was seeing that these people that were converted to the Lord and had started living such powerful, dynamic, spirit-empowered lives were beginning to go off the rails, go off the road. And he was writing to get them back.

The pain of seeing people backslide and seeing them drift away. And he's wanting them to come back. And he's like a father with his children. And he says as much to the, well, not about a father, more about a mother when he writes to the Galatians. And he speaks about the Galatians as those over whom he is laboring in birth pains all over again. It's like a mother giving birth to a child.

The agony he went through. And he was saying to the Galatians that he was going through this a second time. So he's obviously gone through it a first time. First time he agonized in ministering to them, praying for them until they were converted. And after they were converted and started drifting away from the right path, he agonized all over again for them going through these labor pains. Until Christ, he said, is formed in you. Until you grow as Christians. Until you become more like the people God is destining you to be. So he isn't hard and he isn't callous and he isn't loveless. Just kind of lording it over their faith. He's saying, no, we want you. We want you to become more and more like the people God intends you to be. And that's why we're ministering this way to you. And he's saying when we've got to be severe and when we've got to be down the line, it's with much affliction, it's with anguish, and it's with tears. Because I don't want to cause you pain. Causing pain isn't the objective. But it'll cause pain. It's not an end in itself. There is a godly sorrow, he says later on, that leads to repentance. It's a sorrow that produces a change. And he says, it's a good thing if you've got that. So we can maybe identify, some of us maybe can identify with that.

[8:33] Being in our Christian lives, and maybe we're the ones who started straying a little bit. And maybe we're the ones that had to be pulled back into line. Or maybe we're those who've had to see and go through the agony of seeing people backslide and drift. Maybe it's still going on at the moment.

And maybe you've got that turmoil. And maybe you just want people to understand those that you love, you love them in the Lord. And that's why you're doing this. Because there is this thing, this idea that kind of goes around. And you hear it, you know, judge not and you be not judged, our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount. And that's as if to say you mustn't criticize. You mustn't say anything with a view to correction. I mean, that's, Jesus says, judge not that you be not judged. You better watch out if you do that kind of thing. But again, chapters two and three of the book of Revelation, our Lord corrects the church. He corrects. He points out what's wrong. And I mean, who is more loving?

Who is more gracious, wise than him? So we need that. We need to be reminded of our need to be changed, our calling us, if we are Christians, to be helping others if we see them drifting. And having the courage to speak to them. And not just leaving it until it's too late. But what does that have to do with where we are this evening? Well, we want to look this evening at what Paul says to the Corinthians about his own sufferings on their behalf. And it's in this context of the Corinthians experiencing comfort. And the comfort they're experiencing isn't just associated with their mind, their reasoning and their logic. That's part of it. But it's an actual experience of peace that they have in their hearts. Something that God himself communicates and gives by his spirit. It's a wonderful thing. And Paul is really saying, look, the comfort you have in Corinth, it's being pressed out of us. In what sense? Well, let's try looking at first thing, where he talks about consolation.

And then, if we can, there'll be a few moments to say something at the end about his explanation as to why he changed his travel plans. Two things are connected. It's a very, very personal letter he's writing. And to note that the details is important for us to make the connection.

But as is so often the case in Paul's letters, the theology and the teaching is very often incidental. It's almost by the way. It's almost not the primary reason for his writing to them.

[10:55] He just slips it in. And that's the wonderful thing about it. It makes us think, if only we could have heard him teach. If only we could have been at his feet and learned. But in the providence of God, this is where we are. So firstly, we look at this consolation. He begins in verse 3 of chapter 1.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. What a wonderful thing to remind ourselves of. That this God we have, he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You could stop there and spend how long of, how much of your life trying to get your head around that? The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In what sense? To what degree? And what is this fatherhood and sonship? What is all involved in that? We will spend endless ages of eternity, no doubt, plumbing the depths of what this relationship involves. Not just between father and son, but between father and son as our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God having become man. The wonder, the glory involved in that. His having this position, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ and all that he's accomplished, God having been reconciled to us through the death of his Son. He now becomes to us, who are reconciled, if you're a Christian tonight, if I am, he becomes to us the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. We're living in a life that is filled with sorrow. Sin has brought so much. Devastation and worry and sickness, pain, death, all of these things. And what we need in our Christian lives, especially when we see what's going on, the reasons for what's going on, as Christians we need, do we not, the comfort of God. Maybe you're in a place, maybe I'm in a place, and at times we are, and at times we will be in a place where we need to be comforted. That isn't just kind of, you know, being optimistic and just thinking, well, you know, this is the way it is, and well, who knows? And now people who aren't Christians, maybe yourself, even say this kind of thing, and only quote part of the verse from Romans 8, all things work together for good. Just put it out like that. Cut off the other two ends of what's being referred to by Paul, that it means for those who love God and they're called according to his purpose. But people look at life and they say, look, it'll all work out. It'll be fine in the end. But for Christians, you know, there is a limit to our ability to look like that, at what's going on around us. There can, in some of our situations, be very little hope and very little prospect, if we're honest. There's nothing wrong with being honest about things like that. There's nothing wrong with being honest with yourself about something like this, because you might, as a Christian, think Christians mustn't ever think this situation is too hard for me. It's where is faith in that moment?

Well, let's notice what Paul is saying. He is the God, Father of mercies, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with a comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. So in this situation and context of suffering and affliction, the weight and the heaviness of trials and difficulties, Paul is saying God is putting us through things. And in putting us through things that are so difficult, he strips us of all hope and dependence in ourselves in order to fill us with an experience of his own comfort. Peace I leave with you, Jesus said. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. There's other verses to that effect of later on with the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. These experiences, they are experiences and we need and we long for more experiences in our Christian life. It's not just a cerebral Christianity, but one that involves our whole personality, our feelings, our mind, our will, everything about us. And Paul is saying God takes us to that place where we look around us. We look at everyone. We look at ourselves and there is nothing in us, nothing in anyone else, nothing in the place we're in that we can look at and draw any comfort from. You ever been there? Paul is saying there's a reason for this. For us in the first place, God takes us there in order to comfort us. If you're not taken to these places, you can put it the other way. If you're not taken to these places, you'll never know that comfort. But there's more than that.

Paul is saying God takes us to that place in order that in our affliction he may comfort us so that when you're then in a place of affliction, we'll be able to comfort you with the comfort that God has in the first place given to us. Isn't that an amazing thing?

That your sufferings may even be part of a ministry of sorts that God has given to you. So you can identify with people where they are in their sufferings. And not only that, but you can come alongside them where they are and you can comfort. How can you comfort? Well, you can comfort by how you speak, by your sympathy, the fact you've been through the very same thing that they've been through. But at the same time, I think there's something more than that. It gives the impression here within Paul's language that through the ministry of Paul and the others, God is actually communicating his comfort and peace to those to whom they're ministering. The activity of God, the work of the Holy Spirit. And you know what that's like yourself. Christian people know what this is like.

[16:44] Where it's through the word, through the ministry, at times in your life, you get this comfort. You get this peace. It hasn't come from your own thought process, although your thoughts are involved. It comes from God through all that he's doing through his word. It's a wonderful thing that.

To be able to comfort someone. You look at it from another angle. Don't you know what it's like for someone to try and comfort or console in a, whatever the situation is, it doesn't matter what the situation is. It's personal to you and that's all that matters. And you know the person hasn't a clue what you're going through. But they speak to you and they try and comfort you. And you know when they're trying to do it, even if it's by quoting the Bible to you. Best will in the world, you realize when they're trying to say, you don't need to say it to them, but you know in your own heart, you haven't a clue what's going on here. But see when someone has gone through it. And someone can come alongside you and speak to you. And someone can comfort you from that perspective. What a blessing it is.

So where are you tonight? Your own mind, your own circumstances, your own health, whatever it might be, the situation that you find yourself in, in order for you to become a blessing in someone else's life.

To welcome the afflictions, to welcome the trials. Not to ask for them. But there are some that God sends our way that we don't ask for, look for, expect, or want. Paul in chapter 12 of this very letter himself had a, you remember the thorn in the flesh, he had his own affliction. He had many afflictions, we'll see in just a minute. But he had one that he was going to carry with him for the rest of his life. I prayed three times to the Lord to take it away. The Lord said, no, but I'll give you something better. I'll give you my grace, which he explained as meaning his strength that would be perfected in Paul's weakness. So Paul said, I will gladly, glory, he says, I will boast, I will rejoice in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest on me. Because when I'm weak, then he says, I'm strong. What kind of sufferings is Paul talking about? We're afflicted, he says in verse 6, for your comfort and salvation. The cost involved of being in this work that Paul was involved in.

Look what he says in verse 8. This is one personal reference that he makes to it. We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. Now, we don't know what that affliction was. We know that there were difficulties throughout his ministry, but as far as the particular situation here is concerned, I don't think we know in any real or certain way. But look at how Paul felt. You look on the outside of this man, and you'd think nothing could touch or face him. But it's a miracle, rather, to think of it. It's a miracle.

[19:29] I think it's a miracle. I think it's right, maybe, hopefully right to say that, that Paul didn't just die of all the weight and the pressure involved in everything that he went through. He says in this instance, the affliction in Asia, we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. He reached that point in his ministry and in his work, and there were circumstances and factors that he didn't create that weren't imposed on himself by, it wasn't something as a result of sin, but an affliction and a trial from God.

And he says, we were in this place that we were utterly burdened beyond our strength, despairing of life itself. Some people suggest that it might have been an illness that Paul experienced. And he reached the situation, we don't know, but whatever it was, he was, see the language, utterly burdened beyond our strength. And you're saying to the Lord, I can't cope with this. Yeah, there's an apostle who speaks like that. There's an apostle who knows and is honest to saying to the Corinthians, look, you look at me and you get this impression, and you say, you know, you're inflicting pain and you're hard and all of this. He says, we're in this for your comfort. We're in this for your salvation. But remember what it costs.

It costs us in this experience, reaching the point beyond which we felt we wouldn't survive. We just felt this thing is just going to kill me. He says that. Verse 9, indeed, when he says despairing of life, what does that mean? I think verse 9 explains it. We felt that we had received the sentence of death. We were in a situation that looked fatal. It looked at that moment, at that point in our lives that God was saying, okay, you're not going to survive this.

And in that sense, he was despairing of life in the sense of thinking, I'm not going to come through this, whether it's an illness or whatever it was. But he's saying to them, this is the reason I went through, the end of verse 9. This was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. So God will take me to a place where I'm as good as dead. And I can say to God, I don't think I'm going to come through this. This is going to end my life. I'm just going to crumble under the weight of it. As he says later on, we have this treasure in jars of clay. We're just jars of clay that can crumble and be smashed into pieces so very easily. But God has chosen to put the gospel, the treasure in jars of clay, so that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of us.

That people will see, you're weak, you're empty, you're fragile, you're frail, all of us as Christians, all of us as human beings. But in terms of ministering the gospel, that's what he's saying. Paul is saying, yes, and God teaches me that. He brings me to a place where I think I'm about to die. But he does that to make me not rely on myself anymore. See the point of the trial and the affliction he's going through. Places you might be in today and situations God may yet bring you or me to where we find. But this is just too much. And we might be thinking that God is going to take us away at this point. And yet God actually preserves and prolongs our lives. But he's taking us, and we've got to remember this, if we're ever in this situation, God takes us to these situations to rely on him. It's never a comfortable place to be. We'd admit that. I mean, none of us like being in places or situations where we're not in control. I don't mean by that that we're kind of assuming

[23:08] God's role of governing our lives and these things. I don't mean that, but in the sense that we are committing our lives to God and we're trying to follow him faithfully and believe in him. And at the same time, we do what we do with what we've got as far as we're able to do it.

But when God takes all of that away, that's when we've got to trust him. And that's when it's very uncomfortable, but that's where we will find our strength not to rely on ourselves, but on God, he says, who raises the dead, the God of resurrection, the God who takes the dead to life again. Yes, I'll bring you to that place and I'll make you alive again so that you'll trust me and so that you will believe in me and so that you will experience my life and experience our power.

He says in verse 10, he delivered us from such a deadly peril. So he's looking back now. He's writing to them in the present. He's reminding them, telling them of an experience he had in the past.

And he's saying, verse 10, he delivered us from that deadly peril and he will deliver us. See, that's the way his faith is going. And this is where we've got to live and how we've got to think.

If he took me out of that one, and he did, he will take me out of this one. More than that, on him, we've set our hope that he will deliver us again. He's the God who can raise the dead.

[24:28] In the circumstances Paul was in, he was as good as dead. And Paul is saying, God raised me. He brought me through this. He delivered me. He'll deliver me again and he'll deliver me again. But the deliverance comes when we're taken back down to that low place where we can't trust, well not trust, trust in the sense of depend or look to for support and strength and deliverance.

Not in us, not in anyone, but only in God. It's the Christian life, isn't it? And you may look on at this if you're not a Christian and think, I want nothing to do with that kind of life. I want a life that's easygoing. I want a life that has no demands. I don't want to believe in a God who'll send things my way that are too hard for me. But you know, you're going to find them just the same. Different reasons behind the things that come your way from God's hand. Remember, we saw something to that effect earlier on in the day with Nebuchadnezzar, although it would seem that he became, I believe, and his life was actually changed by God and that experience. There were other things. You think of the wider context, things that happen to people, things that come along, and things the king who came after, well, after in the book of Daniel, chapter 5, Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar likely would have been a great-grandson or something like that. We don't know for sure his relationship with Nebuchadnezzar. But Belshazzar was a man, proud and arrogant, just like Nebuchadnezzar had been. And God came into his life, and God, the very night with writing on the wall, you remember that account, God took his life away. You know, so the end of the day, you look on and you think, I don't want to live my life in following a God who might send things my way that's going to rob me of all comfort, rob me of health, rob me of this, that, and the next thing. I'd rather carry on living my life the way I want. But you know, you've got no guarantees about anything that God isn't going to bring something your way. And God will speak, and he'll speak to you, speak to me through everything he sends into our lives. And he is speaking to us. You know, he that has ears to hear, let him hear. But in case you think about going through life without God and enjoying it, just going in your own strength in these things, you miss out. And so this isn't a reason to become a Christian. I don't mean this is the reason, but it's involved in it. You will never know, and as ourselves who are Christians at one point were, and we never knew either what it was like to experience God in all of these changing and all of these difficult and trying situations.

And what God does, and so many of the things he brings, is he makes himself known to us. There is nothing in this life, nothing in this life, the Bible says as much, that Jesus, he said, I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly. And he explains in John 17, this is eternal life, that they might know you, the only through God and Jesus Christ whom you've sent.

Having a living, saving relationship with God, where you know him, not just knowing about him anymore, always be learning more about him, but it's learning more about someone you're in a living relationship with. Nothing like that. You were made for it, I was made for it. God created us.

[27:47] We were created in his image and likeness, and so far going back thinking of us in the sense of Adam and Eve, that was all lost through sin, not the image in every sense, but living in fellowship with God.

There is nothing, and any Christian in this building tonight would tell you as much, there is nothing in this world that can even begin to come anywhere near to the greatness of knowing God, knowing him. And it's a knowledge that you're never satisfied with, not because you want anything other than it, but you want more of it. Remember Paul himself said it to the Philippians, where he was saying that I might know him. He can almost add an ode to the beginning of that, the urgency, the longing of his heart to have more of an acquaintance, familiarity, relationship with the living God. Oh yes, and that deep acquaintance, that deepening acquaintance often comes the Christian's way in the afflictions that God sends. Strips everything away from us, strips relying on ourselves away from us, and we rely on him, and we come to experience him.

The blessings, the joys, the comforts. You know Romans 5, where Paul is speaking about justification. It's very interesting, the context that he's speaking in, in explaining the relationship that Christians are brought into the standing. He says, Romans 5, 1, therefore, since we've been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him, we've also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Now, we sometimes stop there, but see how he goes on. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings. See that? We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame. It's not this wishful thinking, something that might not end up coming through in the end. No, hope doesn't put us to shame. It doesn't disappoint, because the love of God, God's love, has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

So when you're in afflictions, he says, we can rejoice in it. Not because of the affliction, in and of itself. But while the affliction's there, he says, we can rejoice in it, knowing the outcome of it, knowing that God is stretching us, and maturing us, and developing and growing us, but in the very center of it, God sheds and pours his love into our hearts. We experience an experiential reality where we feel the power of God's love in our hearts. Nothing like that.

[30:28] Well, the consolation, he's saying, this is how it's going to come to you. The comfort. But briefly, the second thing, we just look at his explanation to them. Because he moves on from that subject to say, well, look, we're going through what we're going through to be able to minister to you comfort, blessing, and assurance. But he's saying, on another note, there's people over in Corinth, and they're saying, look, this Paul is saying, I'm coming to you, and then he changes his mind.

And you can't believe a word he says. This is kind of paraphrase the gist of what I think he's saying. For example, verse 16, I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia. So I wanted to do two visits, but I didn't visit you twice. Verse 17, was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh? Meaning, do I do it as someone who isn't a Christian, and say, well, yeah, I'll come when I don't have any intention of coming to see you?

No, he says. As surely as God is faithful, that's a very strong thing he's saying, our word to you has not been yes and no. He's saying, everything we've said to you in our ministry and in our dealings has been according to our word. So when we say yes, we mean yes, and we do yes. We don't say yes, we're not double-minded. We don't switch. We're not in any kind of way spineless and independently saying no. And notice what he does in this. He launches straight into a declaration of God's character and God's redemptive purpose in his son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And we'll see, hopefully, that that's got a bearing on us. See what he says. As surely as God is faithful, God keeps his word. He's not saying we're as faithful as God. But as God is faithful to his word, we've been the same with you. You'll find nothing in anything we've said that hasn't been faithful. We've kept our word to you. Verse 19, the son of God. Wonderful statement. Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus, Timothy, and I, was not yes and no, but in him it is always yes.

God is faithful. He stands by his word all the time. Jesus is faithful. He is always through and he is always according to his word. Then verse 20, he moves on to this interesting one.

And this is how incidental it is. If you catch the drift of this and notice it in all of Paul's writings, you get this. It's that when he makes a statement, he just goes off on one. It's a real declaration. So he's talking about why we didn't come to see you the second time. It's not because we don't keep our word, but God is faithful. He keeps his word and we were faithful. We kept our word.

[33:12] And Jesus, he moves on. He takes a step forward. Jesus, it's always yes in him. He's faithful to his word. And by the way, he goes on to say verse 20, all the promises of God find their fulfillment, their yes in him. So way back to the dawn of history, the promise made in the garden of Eden and everyone ever since. God has promised that the Messiah will come. The seed of the woman is going to be born. There's going to be a male born through Eve at the end of a long process after many generations. And all the promises unfolding gradually throughout the Old Testament, they reach their fulfillment in the conception, the birth, the life, the death, and all the rest of our Lord's ministry to this very day and to all eternity. The promises of God find their yes in him, their fulfillment. What does that mean for us? Well, just think about it for a minute. I don't know your views about the Bible. I don't know what you think. Maybe you've got difficulty with some parts of it.

You don't understand it, or maybe you can't square it with other things, be it science or whatever you see in the world. But just think about this for a minute. You think about the promises that God has made in his word, particularly referring to the Old Testament. And follow out from Genesis right through. It's a study, a massive study, but do this. Follow through the promises God made to their fulfillment. And stand back for a minute just from that and think about this God. Is this the word of God? Where else? In what other book that isn't written after the event will you find predictions, promises, prophecies, finding the perfect fulfillment? Only in the Bible. Only in the Bible. And if that's the case, you need to think seriously about this book. You need to listen, and I need to listen.

But more than that, it's not that we stop at the book. It's not that you become bibliologists. We don't worship the Bible. We don't worship a book. But it's the channel, the means through which God speaks to us, and where we learn and understand more and more of what God's will is, and all of God's works, and these things that he's been pleased to reveal to us. It's there that we come, and we realize, and come to meet the God of the Bible. You see, there is the written word, and there's the living word. He's called that in John 1. In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and the word was God. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the revelation, the communication, the self-disclosure of God himself through the Bible. Why say all of that? Well, Paul is saying, think about it.

All of God's promises find their fulfillment in Jesus, ultimately. And what a book you've got in your hands, and that's the case. You can depend on it. But as well, when you bear in mind God's faithfulness to his words, you and I, we need to make sure that we listen to him. Not just that we say, wow, what a book. How amazing, like nothing else on the face of the earth. But that we come to meet this God for ourselves, and ask him to show himself to us, to show ourselves to ourselves, and to bring us into this saving relationship with him, so that we'd understand what all the promises in Jesus mean. It's all about redemption, salvation, forgiveness, everlasting life, the promise of the glory to come, and all that that's involved in these realities. All the promises find their yes in him. But notice what he says. This is also verse 20. That is why it is through him that we utter our amen to God for his glory. The logic is really tight. It's typical of Paul.

From the very beginning, verse 3 and through, the logic is there, and you sometimes, how he uses comfort and different, and affliction in different kind of places and sentences, and you kind of think, what's he meaning by it here? What's he meaning by it there? He thinks very, very logically, very, very, you know, tightly. But what he goes on to say from all the promises of God find their yes in him.

[37 : 20] They find their fulfillment. And he says, because of that, we give our yes to these promises. Because we see God keeping his word. God says amen, as it were. Let it be. Yes. We, in seeing that, we say amen. Let it be. Yes, as well. Which is basically saying we embrace this word.

We embrace the promises of God. We embrace the God of the Bible. We say amen to it. Now, there's a question. Do you? Do you find in your own heart that you concur 100% with the Bible? Every single part of it.

The bits you don't understand. No questions about it. This is God's word to me, and I embrace it. It's like Psalm 119 from beginning to end. Loving the Bible. Loving God's word. Embracing it.

It's a great proof of being a Christian. There's many ways we could analyze ourselves and ask, well, how do I know if I'm a Christian or not? Well, one thing to ask is, what place does the Bible have in your heart?

Not just in your life. I mean, the Bible can have a massive place in your life. And I hope it is. It has a massive place in your life. And insofar as you read it and study it and ask God to bless and unfold and apply it to you. But does it have a place in your heart? In your thoughts? In your feelings? In your desires?

[38 : 43] You know, are you like, you know, throughout the Psalms, you find that Psalm 1, the very first one, for example, is that the righteous man meditates on God's law day and night. Is this the most important possession you've got? The word of God. The nearest thing, tangible thing that you can actually hold.

And it's the most tangible thing that you have in relation to God. It's quite a thought that. God is a spirit. He's invisible. You cannot touch him. Yes, we can in a mysterious way feel his presence at times.

But that isn't in a physical way necessarily. The body's involved in that, of course. But as far as the Bible is concerned, we as human beings and having bodies and functioning and engaging with reality outside of us by the senses, we hold this book and it's the only real tangible thing, touchable, that we have from God that we can have.

Some people would then start worshiping the Bible and thinking it's, you know, making, you can do that. The Jews even did that. You search the scriptures, Jesus said in John 5, for in them you think you have eternal life.

Just having them doesn't save you. But having it in your heart is a proof that God is at work there. Does the Bible have that effect on you? Are you saying amen to it deep down?

[40 : 05] Now there's another thing we really don't have time. It would be lovely if we did. But it's where he goes on from that. And again, he's just saying to them, why I didn't come and visit you the second time. It's not because I'm double-minded or I hesitate between saying yes and no.

He's saying, I'm saying yes. The reason I didn't come to you is because I didn't want to get into pain and suffering, meeting you, being in the mess that you were in. It's not that I don't keep my word. It's that you were in a bad way and it was causing me no end of grief to just be virtually kicked out by you.

But how he moves on. The promises are fulfilled in Jesus. We say for that reason amen to them. But notice verse 21-22.

And it is God who establishes us with you. You see the steps he's taking. God keeps his word in Christ. We say amen to these promises because we believe and we embrace the whole thing.

And it is God who establishes. The reason for all of that is that God has brought us into a relationship with Jesus. Which involves anointing us. You know the separation of the Holy Spirit.

- [41 : 09] The anointing the prophets, the priests, the kings. It was a divine setting apart and an empowering for that setting apart. He's anointed us. He's put a seal on us.
- And he is the last thing we'll see. He has given us his spirit in our hearts as a guarantee or as a down payment. Which is like a deposit.
- Where you put a certain fixed sum down on something that you're purchasing. And it is the promise and pledge of the full payment down the line.
- And Paul is saying God has anointed us. He has sealed us. And he has put his spirit into our hearts as a down payment. Which is God's promise to us.
- That if we have the spirit. If we do say amen to the Bible. And all that's involved in that. Because of all that it reveals. It's because God meets us. Reveals himself to us in it. We know him. We commune and fellowship with him through it.
- [42 : 07] When we say amen to that. That doesn't come from within us. Back in 1 Corinthians 2. He explains as much. That the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God.
- He doesn't. He cannot. But they're foolishness. The Bible you think. Nonsense. Holy book. No different from any other one. Written by any other religious people.
- You may even challenge it. The Jews were tripping up over it. It was a stumbling block. The Greeks were saying foolishness. Resurrection. What's that? Nonsense. Festus would say to Paul. You're out of your mind.
- You're reading too much of these books. You're brainwashed. But those who have the spirit. Receive the things of the spirit. They understand.
- Not totally. But they have an understanding. And we say amen to it all. And if that's true. It's because God has given you his spirit. As a down payment.
- [43 : 04] Which is God saying to you. Looking in your heart. Experiencing these realities. Is proof to you. That you're going to be in heaven one day. That you're going to be part of the consummated kingdom.
- And not only the salvation of your souls. But as 1 Corinthians 15. Your body as well. He goes on in fact. In chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians. They say the same thing. The body will be clothed upon.
- With its heavenly dwelling. It will have spiritual qualities. It will be empowered by. Suited for. The realm of the spirit. That is coming. So really when you think about it.
- It's just astonishing. How incidental. These theological truths are just. Woven into this narrative. The letter. Paul giving the narrative of. Where he's been. Why he didn't come back.
- And we stand back and think. This is just amazing. We should be anyway. Shouldn't we? Be astonished at this. And be so thankful. If we've ever come to experience. The truth of these things.
- [43 : 59] For ourselves. The consolation. And the explanation. Well God granted. His blessing. Upon us as we. Come under his word. And as we leave his house.
- We'll pray together.