

We
entreat you
on behalf
of Christ, be
to God.

Comfort/encouragement from Second Corinthians ...

Hope and Prayers

The situation in Ephesus must have been beyond description. The words the apostle Paul uses to describe the conditions of him and his fellow preachers and teachers give us a glimpse of the incredible "affliction" that they endured, and these words were coming from a man who was no stranger to trials and persecutions. "Burdened excessively," he relates, "beyond our strength." "We despaired even of life," he superadds, and "we had the sentence of death within ourselves." He and those with him were pushed to the brink, to the edge of what those who still walk in a fleshly body can bear. In the process, even he learned to "trust in God, who raises the dead."

◆ **Set our hope** — Over and over the scripture uses the word hope in connection with the saint's ultimate resurrection from the dead. The apostle Peter stated that God "has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). When Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome, speaking of the resurrection of the dead (which he called in that section of scripture "the redemption of our body"), he used this terminology, "For in hope we have been saved" (Romans 8:23,24). And twice while on trial before Jewish authorities, he similarly expressed himself: "I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead," he challenged the Sanhedrin; and before Roman governor Felix he clarified his stance, affirming that he had "a hope in God, which these men [his accusers] cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 23:6; 24:15). Of those severe trials in Ephesus, then, he recalls for the benefit of the Corinthian Christians, that the God who raises the dead "delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope" (2 Corinthians 1:10). Certainly if the Almighty can give the saint real hope in His positive resurrection from the dead, then He can deliver the disciple of Christ from lesser challenges, such as persecution, also.

- ◆ **Future deliverances** — Paul knew that as long as the Lord needed him to stay alive and continue his work on earth, he would not be taken in physical death. Both Peter and Paul were informed that the hour of their "departures" was at hand, from that point on they knew their earthly sojourn was coming to an end. Until the arrival of that time, however, Paul expressed confidence that the One on whom he set his hope "will yet deliver us."
- ◆ **Importance of prayers** — The word of God also repeatedly stresses the importance of the prayers of the saints, although the results are often very intangible or hard to prove. In expressing his confidence that God would continue to deliver the apostle and his traveling companions from death in persecutions, he appends this salient comment, "you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many" (2 Corinthians 1:11). The author, it is important to note, is inspired by the Holy Spirit as he writes this letter. It is clear and encouraging to hear from the heavenly perspective that the prayers of the saints actually help those faithful proclaimers such as Paul to be delivered. God is thus motivating the saints to pray for deliverance for those persecuted and imprisoned, and for the appropriate thanksgivings to be offered as well.

In God's divine economy, He somehow pays attention to the prayers of faithful saints, and they have a positive impact on the deliverance of His "favored" preachers and teachers, as well as saints imprisoned for their faith. He can, and will, grant deliverance until such time as He decides that it is time for the Christian to make his "departure" from the earthly realm. Then the "hope of the resurrection of the righteous" kicks in, and God's sure word never fails to accomplish its purpose!

*God pays
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JAY WILSON