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David E. Fredrickson

Luther Seminary, [dfredric@luthersem.edu](mailto:dfredric@luthersem.edu)

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# PAUL, HARDSHIPS, AND SUFFERING

David E. Fredrickson

I focus my examination of suffering on the concept of grief (λύπη, *lypē*), which in the Greco-Roman world was widely considered one type of passion. The Greek term for passion (πάθος, *pathos*) denotes the self being acted upon rather than acting upon the external world. To suffer (πάσχειν, *paschein*) is to be moved by externals.<sup>1</sup> From the philosophic perspective, it mattered little whether this movement was occasioned by grief or by the other main types of passion (fear, pleasure, lust, and, in some sources, anger). This association of suffering with passion in general, though correct, would indicate too broad a range of inquiry. For practical reasons, therefore, I limit this investigation to what English-speakers normally mean by suffering—emotional pain or grief.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, I highlight aspects of the ancient discourse about grief that bear directly on the interpretation of Paul's letters: some pertinent forms of grief, hardships and hardship lists, the role of grief in moral reformation; two ancient letter types that make grief thematic; and the notion of shared suffering in friendship.

## Part I. Hardships and Suffering in Greco-Roman Philosophy and Epistolography

### *The Psychology of Suffering*

Grief as irrational contraction (συστολή, *systolē*) of the soul or heart is a commonplace in Stoic psychology (Diogenes Laertius 7.111,118; *SVF* 1.51.26–31; 3.94.14–15; 3.95.17–18, 24–25, 41–43; Epictetus, *frg.* 9; Plutarch, *Lib. aegr.* 1,7).<sup>3</sup> Cicero shows that the metaphor of grief as soul shrinkage was so well established in Greek writers that it survived the translation of philosophical terms into Latin: “Distress [*aegritudo*] then is a newly formed belief of present evil, the subject of which thinks it right to feel depression and shrinking of soul [*demitti contrahique*

*animo*)” (Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.14; cf. *Tusc.* 1.90; 3.83; 4.66–67; *Quint. frat.* 1.1.4; Seneca, *Ep.* 99.15). Some of the varieties of grief imply the idea of contraction. For example, groaning (στεναγμός, *stenagmos*) conveys the notion of contraction in the root στεν (*sten*; see Rom 8:23, 26; 2 Cor 5:2, 4).<sup>4</sup> Soul shrinkage accounts in the philosophers for the experience of grief at its most fundamental level.<sup>5</sup>

Not all types of emotional pain, however, exhibit contraction of soul. One such variety of grief often treated by the philosophers was regret (μεταμέλεια, *metameleia*), a particularly sharp form of suffering. The standard definition of regret was “grief over sins done as though happening through one’s own self.”<sup>6</sup> What makes regret so painful is self-hatred and self-condemnation: “Regret is a factious passion of the soul which brings unhappiness, for to the extent that the one is encompassed by regrets and is grieved at the things which have happened, to this degree he is angry at himself, since he became the cause of these things” (*SVF* 3.149.20–24; my translation). According to Plutarch, the soul that regrets a deed is filled with no other thought than “how it might escape from the memory of its iniquities, drive out of itself the consciousness of guilt, regain its purity, and begin life anew” (Plutarch, *Sera* 556A). Such persons condemn their lives, feel remorse, hate themselves, and are distressed over what they have done (Plutarch, *Sera* 566E). The notion that, as Seneca put it, “he who has sinned has already punished himself,” echoed throughout ancient writings (Seneca, *Ira* 2.30.2).<sup>7</sup> Seneca comments further that “no man is more heavily punished than he who is consigned to the torture of remorse” (Seneca, *Ira* 3.26.2).

Philosophers used the notion of self-condemnation to explain the nature of regret. Aristotle formalized a connection probably found already in everyday speech: “But a good man does not rebuke himself either at the time, like the uncontrolled, nor yet his former self his later, like the penitent [ὁ μεταμελητικός, *ho metamelētikos*] . . . because when men blame themselves they are putting themselves to death” (Aristotle, *Eth. eud.* 7.6.14–15; modified translation).

Plutarch draws out the analogy between regret and punishment. Like prisoners sentenced to death, every wicked man suffers “terrors, forebodings, and the pangs of remorse” (μεταμελείας, *metameleias*; Plutarch, *Sera* 554E–F). He also writes that when “despots . . . desire to make miserable those whom they punish, [they] maintain executioners and torturers, or devise branding-irons and wedges; vice . . . fills the man with grief and lamentation, dejection and remorse” (μεταμελείας, *metameleias*; Plutarch, *An vit.* 498D; cf. *Sera* 554A–B). Consciousness of a sin “leaves behind it in the soul regret [μεταμέλειαν, *metameleian*] which ever continues to wound and prick it. For the other pangs reason does away with, but regret [μετάνοιαν, *metanoian*] is caused by reason itself, since the soul, together with its feeling of shame, is stung and chastised by itself” (Plutarch, *Tranq. an.* 476E–477B; cf. *Gen. Socr.* 592A–B).

This understanding of regret in juridical metaphors occurred frequently in discussions of conscience and repentance.<sup>8</sup> Writers used courtroom imagery for the self-examination of conscience (Seneca, *Ira* 3.36.3; Juvenal, *Sat.* 13.2–3). The notion of a self-imposed sentence of death figures prominently: “genuine repentance is utterly to root out of the soul the sins for which a man has condemned himself to death” (Clement of Alexandria, *Quis div.* 39; cf. *Strom.* 4.22.143).

### *Hardships and Hardship Lists*

The work of John T. Fitzgerald on hardships and hardship lists in ancient moral philosophy has proven to be a rich resource for students of the Pauline epistles.<sup>9</sup> He summarizes what writers had in mind when recounting hardships:

The intimate connection between virtue and adversity has been thoroughly documented in the preceding pages. Since *peristaseis* [difficulties] constitute a test of human character, they have both a revelatory and a demonstrative function. The man with little or no integrity collapses under the weight of his burdens. His *peristaseis* reveal and prove his deficiencies as a person. The *proficiens* [one who makes progress], by contrast, shows greater strength of character in dealing with his hardships, so that his *peristaseis* reveal his progress, what he is *becoming*. Since they help to form his character, they play a crucial role in his *paideia* [education]. For the *sapiens* [wise man], however, *peristaseis* no longer have this educative character. They provide the proof that he is educated. Consequently, they exhibit who he *is*, what he has *become*.<sup>10</sup>

Fitzgerald has accounted for two functions of the philosophic discourse about hardships. First, the philosophers taught that reason is superior to all the vicissitudes of life, and because the self is identified with reason, nothing external can cause harm.<sup>11</sup> Hardships provide an opportunity for this lesson to be illustrated in an actual life.<sup>12</sup> Second, by the time of Paul, most philosophers had abandoned the absolute distinction between the wise man and the fool and had settled on a doctrine of progress in moral virtue.<sup>13</sup> The notion that hardships train the *proficiens* (one who makes progress) in virtue and that suffering produces character in the one striving for wisdom had widespread appeal.<sup>14</sup>

We have seen that hardships demonstrate the sage’s virtue or train the person aspiring to the serenity of the sage. There was yet a third function of representing the sage’s endurance: to demonstrate his philanthropy (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.12.17–25; Lucian, *Peregr.* 18). Reminiscent of Antisthenes’ depiction of Odysseus’s dangers (Antisthenes, *frag.* 15.1–3, 9),<sup>15</sup> Dio Chrysostom distinguishes himself from philosophers who refused to associate with the crowd and face danger: “For some among that company do not appear in public at all and prefer not to make the

venture, possibly because they despair of being able to improve the masses" (Dio Chrysostom, *Alex.* 8; cf. *Alex.* 24; *1 Tars.* 15).<sup>16</sup> The genuine philosopher "stands ready, if need be, to submit to ridicule and to the disorder and the uproar of the mob" (Dio Chrysostom, *Alex.* 32.11). He should be compared with Diogenes, whose free speech was often not endured (Dio Chrysostom, *Isthm.* 9.7–9).<sup>17</sup>

### Grief and Moral Reformation

Harsh Cynic philosophers regarded moral failure as justification for causing grief (λύπη, *lypē*) (Ps.-Socrates, *Ep.* 24; Lucian, *Pisc.* 20).<sup>18</sup> From a text representing harsh Cynicism, we learn that the laughter of Democritus aimed to condemn humanity for its foolishness.<sup>19</sup> Not regarding laughter a strong enough measure against human vice, however, Democritus wished "to discover something even more painful [λύπηρόν, *lypēron*] to use against them" (Ps.-Hippocrates, *Ep.* 17.45 [Hercher, *Epistolographi Graeci* 304, my translation]). Cynic moral reproof was often painful because it was inopportune (Ps.-Hippocrates, *Ep.* 17.19–20, 34). Hippocrates protests that Democritus's laughter at others' misfortunes does not consider the circumstances of those he mocks (Ps.-Hippocrates, *Ep.* 17.20–21). Likewise, Plutarch denounces those who cause suffering when the circumstances of the hearer demand encouragement and consolation (Plutarch, *Adul. amic.* 69A).

In response to these criticisms, some Cynics sought to place their frank speaking in a better light by stressing philanthropic aims (Plutarch, *Virt. mor.* 452D; Stobaeus, *Flor.* 3.13.42).<sup>20</sup> They claimed that although words of truth are sometimes painful, in the end they are beneficial, because they are not motivated by hatred but by a desire to heal others (Seneca, *Vit. beat.* 26.5). It is the duty of the philosopher to benefit others, even if this requires a painful dose of truth-telling (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.1.10–11; cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Alex.* 5, 7, 11; Lucian, *Hermot.* 51).

In his introduction to Epictetus's *Discourses*, Arrian testifies to the concept of appropriate suffering in the reception of moral exhortation:

He was clearly aiming at nothing else but to incite the minds of the hearers to the best things. If, now, these words of his should produce that same effect, they would have, I think, just that success which the words of philosophers ought to have; but if not, let those who read them be assured of this, that when Epictetus himself spoke them, the hearer could not help but feel [πάσχειν, *paschein*] exactly what Epictetus wanted him to feel [παθεῖν, *pathein*]. (*Arriani epistula ad Lucium Gellium* 5–7)

Epictetus himself compared the lecture hall of the philosopher to a hospital, from which students should not walk out in pleasure "but in pain" (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.23.30; cf. 3.1.10–11; 3.23.37).<sup>21</sup>

The role of pain in moral improvement was controversial. For the Epicureans, emotional pain (λύπη, *lypē*) was something to be avoided, because tranquillity, the goal of Epicurean mutual exhortation, was the opposite of grief.<sup>22</sup> In their view, pain was a sign of misapplied or misunderstood frank speech (Philodemus, *Lib.* 12, 13, 31, 61–62, XVA, XVIB, XXIIB). This Epicurean judgment is not far removed from the position of the earlier Stoics, who argued against the usefulness of pain in moral transformation. They considered regret over one's errors a characteristic of the bad person (*SVF* 3.100.33; 3.149.18–24; 3.150.24–27). The later Stoics, on the other hand, emphasized progress in the moral life and mitigated the absolute distinction between the wise man and the fool.<sup>23</sup> In this context, grief over one's errors was a good thing—the beginning of the moral life and a sign of progress (Cicero, *Amic.* 90; Lucian, *Nigr.* 4, 35; Plutarch, *Virt. prof.* 82C).

Plutarch illustrates the function of grief in moral transformation when he describes the way students should listen to the frank speech of philosophers.<sup>24</sup> Although cowardly grief is to be avoided, the student has to feel some pain (Plutarch, *Rec. rat. aud.* 46C). The student must see that the teacher's speech aims to reform character. Admonitions should be allowed to penetrate like a biting drug and cause humiliation, sweating, and dizziness, and a burning with shame in the soul (Plutarch, *Rec. rat. aud.* 46D). Yet Plutarch does not want the student to experience excessive grief:

For this reason he who is taken to task must feel and suffer some smart, yet he should not be crushed or dispirited, but, as though at a solemn rite of novitiate which consecrates him to philosophy, he should submit to the initial purifications and commotions, in the expectation that something delectable and splendid will follow upon his present distress and perturbation. (Plutarch, *Rec. rat. aud.* 47A)

### Grief and Epistolary Theory

In the epistolary handbook of Ps.-Libanius (fourth–sixth centuries C.E.) we discover the following definition of the grieving style: “The grieving style is that in which we present ourselves as being grieved.”<sup>25</sup> More instructive is his sample letter:

The letter of grief [Λυπητικὴ, *Lypētikē*]. You caused me extremely much grief [λελύπηκας, *lerypēkas*] when you did this thing. For that reason I am very much vexed with you, and bear a grief [λυποῦμαι λύπην, *lypoumai lypēn*] that is difficult to assuage. For the grief [λύπαι, *lypai*] men cause their friends is exceedingly difficult to heal, and holds in greater insults than those they receive from their enemies. (Ps.-Libanius, *Charact. Ep.* 90, in Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 80–81)

The grieving style has overtones of rebuke (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep.* 40.1–4; Basil, *Ep.* 44.1).<sup>26</sup> Friendship language calls attention to the unexpected pain the writer has suffered at the hands of his friend and thereby increases the force of the rebuke.

Two letters attributed to Demosthenes, both of doubtful authenticity, exhibit the grieving style. In Epistle 2, Demosthenes complains to the council and assembly of the unfair treatment he has received. The letter is full of indignation and reproach (Demosthenes, *Ep.* 2.1, 3, 8, 12). Demosthenes portrays himself as grief-stricken over the wrongs he has received from his readers (Demosthenes, *Ep.* 2.13, 21–22). Near the conclusion of the letter, he expresses his suffering one last time:

Let not one of you think, men of Athens, that through lack of manhood or from any other base motive I give way to my grief from the beginning to the end of this letter. Not so, but every man is ungrudgingly indulgent to the feeling of the moment, and those that now beset me—if only this had never come to pass!—are sorrows and tears [λῦπαι καὶ δάκρυα, *lypai kai dakrya*], longing both for my country and for you, and pondering over the wrongs I have suffered, all of which cause me to grieve. (Demosthenes, *Ep.* 2.25; cf. *Ep.* 3.44)

Notice especially Demosthenes' reference to his tears and the rebuke they communicate.<sup>27</sup>

The conciliatory letter was another epistolary type that made suffering thematic. According to Ps.-Libanius, the conciliatory style was appropriate when the writer had grieved the letter's recipient: "The conciliatory style is that in which we conciliate someone who has been caused grief by us for some reason. Some also call this the apologetic style" (Ps.-Libanius, *Charact. Ep.* 19, in Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 68–69). As the example below will illustrate, the writer does not deny that he had caused the recipient pain. In fact, he acknowledges the pain his words had inflicted. He does, however, assert that causing pain had not been his intention. Furthermore, even if pain did arise, its real significance, so it is asserted, is the healing that it bestowed in the end:

The conciliatory letter. In addition to making the statements that I did, I went on (to put them) into action, for I most certainly did not think that they would ever cause you sorrow [λυπηθήσεσθαι, *lypēthēsesthai*]. But if you were upset by what was said or done, be assured, most excellent sir, that I shall most certainly no longer mention what was said. For it is my aim always to heal my friends rather than to cause them sorrow [λυπεῖν, *lypein*]. (Ps.-Libanius, *Charact. Ep.* 66, in Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists*, 76–77)

The conciliatory letter reflects the philosophic teaching concerning the reforming power of grief brought on by bold words uttered in friendship (Cicero, *Quint. fratr.* 1.2.12–13; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epp.* 17.1–3; 59.1–4).

### Shared Suffering and Friendship

The notion of friends sharing suffering was not the invention of philosophers. “Suppose the misfortunes of friends to be your own,” Menander wrote, echoing what we can assume to be a widespread opinion.<sup>28</sup> Yet the philosophers explored shared suffering in friendship and, significantly, set limits upon it.

Aristotle recognizes as a friend “one who shares his friend’s joys and sorrows” (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 9.4.1). Furthermore, he points out that suffering is indeed “lightened by the sympathy of friends” (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 9.10.2; cf. Cicero, *Amic.* 22). Aristotle hesitates to answer definitively whether the pain is actually *shared*, or whether it is simply the pleasure of comrades’ company and “consciousness of their sympathy” that mitigates pain. He does maintain, however, that it is “womanish” for one person to allow another to share in pain (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 9.11.4).

Later writers enforce a similar limitation. On the one hand, it is necessary to risk danger on account of friendship (Cicero, *Amic.* 23; Plutarch, *Amic. mult.* 96A; Lucian, *Tox.* 7, 9). Yet shared suffering must not go so deep as to touch the soul of the friend who gives comfort (Epictetus, *Ench.* 16.1). It is also problematic whether a friend should share in another’s disrepute (Cicero, *Amic.* 61), although some writers believe this to be the case with true friends (Plutarch, *Amic. mult.* 96B; Lucian, *Tox.* 46; Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 14.5). In spite of these limits imposed by some philosophers, we find the complete sharing of adversity, even pain, sorrow, and grief, to be a commonplace pertaining to friendship (Cicero, *Amic.* 46–48). In fact, according to Lucian this sharing is the first thing that must be said about friendship (Lucian, *Tox.* 6). The ground for such a notion is that friendship is a kind of sharing, that friends have all things in common (Seneca, *Epp.* 6.2; 48.2–4; Themistius, *Or.* 22.269, 270, 274).

The ultimate demonstration of friendship was willingly to suffer death for another (Diogenes Laertius 10.120; Plutarch, *Amic. mult.* 96C–D; Lucian, *Tox.* 20, 36–37; Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 14.3).<sup>29</sup> Cicero reports that theatergoers were moved to standing ovation at scenes of such devotion (Cicero, *Amic.* 24), and we know from literary sources that the theme of death for friendship’s sake was gaining great popularity in the first century B.C.E.<sup>30</sup> Again, however, there was a limit. The one for whom suffering and death are endured must be good. This qualification is based on the requirement that a friendship be established only with the good person. Friendship is possible only after testing to see if the potential friend possesses virtue (Cicero, *Amic.* 79, 85).



## Part II. Hardships and Suffering in Paul's Letters (2 Corinthians 1–7; Romans 5:1–11; and 8:18–39)

### Grief and the Occasion of 2 Corinthians 1–7

Second Corinthians 1–7 is full of references to suffering and hardships. Paul's acknowledgment of the suffering of the Corinthian community opens (1:3–7) and closes (7:8–11) this portion of the letter. References to Paul's own suffering are fitted between the portrayals of the church's grief in two ways. First, he narrates his travel from Asia Minor into Macedonia (1:8–11; 2:12–16; 7:5–6). It is a journey of woe. Second, Paul employs the philosophic convention of hardship lists (4:7–12; 4:16–5:5; and 6:3–10). Our current task is twofold: to reconstruct the occasion of 2 Cor 1–7 and to understand its rhetorical strategy, using what we know about the ancient ways of speaking about suffering and hardships. We treat the occasion first.

In 2 Cor 2:4, Paul refers to a letter which has been named appropriately "the letter of tears": "For out of much affliction [θλίψεως, *thlipseōs*] and contraction of heart [συνοχῆς καρδίας, *synochēs kardias*] I wrote to you through many tears" (διὰ πολλῶν δακρύων, *dia pollōn dakryōn*, my translation). This letter was a critical event between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians.<sup>31</sup> Paul had made an emergency visit to Corinth to deal with the troubles in the church.<sup>32</sup> During this intermediate visit, an individual injured or insulted Paul (2 Cor 1:15, 23; 2:1–11; 7:12; 12:21–13:2).<sup>33</sup> The identity of this individual is unknown, but in the secondary literature he is frequently called ὁ ἀδικήσας (*ho adikēsas*, "the one who caused injury") after 2 Cor 7:12. After Paul left Corinth, he wrote a letter that rebuked the church for not taking disciplinary action against "the one who caused injury."<sup>34</sup>

Our knowledge of the grieving style in ancient epistolography (see above) allows us to see the rebuking function of this letter and to assess its impact on the Corinthian community. Paul portrayed himself as weeping and made his grief the stated motivation for writing. As we have seen, shrinking soul is a commonplace in Stoic psychology, in which expressions similar to Paul's "affliction and contraction of the heart" signify grief. We also know from 2 Cor 7: 8 that this letter caused pain to the congregation at Corinth.

There is more evidence that the pain caused by this letter was a factor in the occasion of 2 Cor 1–7. Many scholars agree that 6:11–13 states Paul's reconciling purpose in writing 2 Cor 1–7, although a full appreciation of his use of the psychology of suffering has not accompanied this correct insight.<sup>35</sup> In 6:11, Paul refers to his frank speech with the phrase "our mouth stands open toward you."<sup>36</sup> He then places his bold speech in the context of friendship. Paul's friendship for the Corinthians is indicated by the joy that accompanies his speech. Joy, understood by the philosophers as the opposite of grief, was often depicted as a widening of

the heart (*SVF* 3.105.17–18; Seneca, *Ep.* 59.2). In 6:12, Paul reiterates his joy for the Corinthians by denying that they are the cause of any grief to him. Reflecting the philosophic definition of grief as soul shrinkage, he says that the church is not restricted (*στενοχωρεῖσθε*, *stenochōreisthe*) in his heart, even as he, as a friend, uses frank speech in moral admonition. Yet in 6:12b, Paul points out the narrowness in the church's affections toward him, and he exhorts his hearers to return his friendship by widening their hearts so that he might exist there. Shrinking soul covered a range of suffering, including annoyance. Indeed, the terms Paul employs to depict the church's attitude toward him in 6:11–13 are reminiscent of the definition of annoyance (Diogenes Laertius 7.111; *SVF* 3.100.29; Plutarch, *Sera* 564B–C; Seneca, *Dial.* 2.10.2–3; *Ira* 2.6.1; Marcus Aurelius 9.32).

So far, we have accounted for two ways in which the issue of suffering contributed to the occasion of 2 Cor 1–7. Paul suffered grief over the community's indifference to the injury that he had received, and the congregation was grieved at being rebuked by Paul through the letter of tears. Another grief must be considered as well. In 2 Cor 2:5–11, Paul skillfully minimizes the wrong that "the one who caused injury" had done to him and pleads with the congregation to affirm love for the man. Apparently, the "letter of tears" had worked too well. The Corinthian congregation had disciplined the offender too harshly, and now, alienated from the community, he suffered from excessive grief, possibly in danger of suicide. Paul's plea in 2:5–11 for the community to exhort, love, and forgive him parallels the philosophical concern for appropriate grief in the context of moral reformation.

To appreciate the grief "the one who caused injury" experienced, attention must be given to the term ἐπιτιμία (*epitimia*) in 2:6. Here ἐπιτιμία is synonymous with ἐπιτιμῆσις (*epitimēsis*, "rebuke").<sup>37</sup> Rebuke was defined as a type of moral exhortation (Isocrates, *Demon.* 1.38; Dio Chrysostom, *Alex.* 33; Lucian, *Demon.* 55; *Jupp. trag.* 23; *Fug.* 12; *Pseudol.* 3; Stobaeus, *Flor.* 3.13.42).<sup>38</sup> Philo draws up a list of the salutary forms of moral discourse:

If I speak in the general assembly I will leave all talk of flattery to others and resort only to such as is salutary and beneficial, reproving [ἐπιτιμῶν, *epitimōn*], warning, correcting in words studied to shew a sober frankness without foolish and frantic arrogance. (Philo, *Ios.* 73; cf. Cicero, *Off.* 1.38.137; Seneca, *Ep.* 94.39; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.9.75.1; 1.9.77.1)<sup>39</sup>

Striking is the inclusion of encouragement and comfort in the contexts in which rebuke is treated as a type of moral exhortation (Plutarch, *Superst.* 168C; Lucian, *Demon.* 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1.9.75.1; 1.9.87.2; Seneca, *Ira* 1.15.1; *Ep.* 99.32; Ps.-Demetrius, *Form. Ep.* 6; Julian, *Or.* 6.201C). Because the final goal of

rebuke was moral improvement, once shame and grief had taken hold and repentance had been brought about, words of encouragement and comfort were to be added lest excessive suffering lead to alienation and even death (Plutarch, [*Lib. ed.*] 13D–E).<sup>40</sup> This is Paul’s stated fear, and exhortation and affirmation of friendship is the remedy he pleads for the church to employ for the sake of the now grief-stricken “one who caused injury.”

One last grief remains to be described. It is Paul’s own grief, suffered as he made his way from Asia Minor to Macedonia in order to receive from Titus news of the congregation’s reaction to the severe rebuke in the letter of tears: “We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction [θλίψεως, *thlipseōs*] we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself” (2 Cor 1:8). Paul exaggerates his suffering for rhetorical purposes, which we will explore more fully below.<sup>41</sup> It is enough here to pinpoint the exact nature of the affliction.

In 1:9, Paul indicates to his hearers that he suffered from regret. He had passed the “sentence of death” (τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου, *to apokrima tou thanatou*) upon himself. We have learned that the metaphor of self-condemnation was a common way of speaking about regret, a variety of grief. Second Corinthians 7:8 confirms that the emotion he describes in 1:9 is regret: “For even if I grieved [ἐλύπησα, *elypēsa*] you with my letter, I do not regret [μεταμέλομαι, *metamelomai*] it, though I did regret [μεταμελόμην, *metamelomēn*] it, for I see that I grieved [ἐλύπησεν, *elypēsen*] you with that letter, though only briefly.” The philosophical understanding of regret as self-condemnation allows us to connect chapters 1 and 7. Some of Paul’s references to his pain in the intervening passages (2:13; 4:8–11; 7:4–7), which otherwise might be understood as allusions to the general sufferings of an apostle, can be seen as the regret he claims to have suffered after writing the letter of tears.

### *Suffering in the Rhetorical Strategy of 2 Corinthians 1–7*

Having pointed out the way grief sets the stage for the letter, we turn now to Paul’s rhetorical strategy within the letter itself. Paul adopts and adapts philosophic and epistolographic conventions to reconcile the Corinthian community, who had been stung by rebuke in the letter of tears. Paul employs four aspects of the ancient discourse about suffering: the notion that friends share both joy and sorrow; the epistolographic conventions of the conciliatory letter; the idea of appropriate grief in the reception of moral exhortation; and the endurance of hardships.

Second Corinthians 1:3–7 develops the notion that friends share both joy and suffering. The key term that connects Paul’s rhetoric with the philosophic discourse about suffering is τὰ παθήματα (*ta pathēmata*):

- 1:5: the sufferings (τὰ παθήματα, *ta pathēmata*) of Christ abound in us  
 1:6: the same sufferings (παθημάτων, *pathēmatōn*) which we ourselves have (πάσχομεν, *paschomen*)  
 1:7: partners in the sufferings (κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων, *koinōnoi este tōn pathēmatōn*, my translation)

Shared suffering is the necessary condition for true friendship. This goes to the heart of traditional teaching on friendship. Christ, Paul, and the church are one because they share emotions. Not only did this identity of emotions provide the ground for friendship, it also defined its task (Plutarch, *Adul. amic.* 49F; *Amic. mult.* 95F–96D; Dio Chrysostom, *3 Regn.* 3.100–103; *Gnomologium Vaticanum* 273; Cicero, *Amic.* 48, 64; Seneca, *Ep.* 6.3). Friends were to share sorrow, or in the Pauline idiom in 2 Cor 1:3–7, to share in affliction (θλίψις, *thlipsis*). It is no surprise, then, that in 1:7 Paul uses the key term for this sharing of emotion in friendship: κοινωνία (*koinōnia*) (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 8.9.1; 8.12.1; 9.12.1; *Eth. eud.* 7.9.1; Plutarch, *Amic. mult.* 96D; Lucian, *Tox.* 6–7; Julian, *Or.* 8.240A–B; 241C).<sup>42</sup>

Second Corinthians 1:3–7 underscores the friendship that Paul claims exists between the community and himself. Sharing suffering is proof that they are friends. Here Paul does not call attention to the fact that *he* caused the community its grief. The vocabulary of suffering is vague enough to allow Paul to categorize the sting of rebuke felt by the church and his own regret to be categorized under the same terms. Later in the letter (beginning in 2:1–4 and culminating in 7:9–10) Paul deals directly with the pain he caused, characterizing it as appropriate grief.

Before exploring that strategy in detail, however, we need to examine the ways 2 Cor 1–7 exhibits characteristics of the conciliatory letter. First, stating one's regret for acting offensively or having written in severe tones was an element in the letter of reconciliation (Cicero, *Quint. frat.* 1.2.12–13; Chariton, *Chaer.* 4.4; Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 562–563; Fronto, *Ad M. Ceas.* 5.59).<sup>43</sup> Paul makes such statements in 1:8–9 and 7:8. Second, Paul follows the conventions of the conciliatory letter by saying that the intention of his rebuke was not to cause pain but to demonstrate his friendship (2:4 and 7:3; see above). Finally, Paul claims that the intent and the effect of his severe words were to promote healing. In 7:8–12, Paul reviews for his readers the salutary effects of the rebuke conveyed in the grieving letter. Behind these verses stands the *topos* that a friend does not intend his frank speech to cause pain but to bring about repentance and moral healing. The progression in 7:9–10 from grief to repentance and then to salvation places Paul's characterization of his treatment of the church squarely in the psychagogic tradition (see above).

The distinction between godly grief and worldly grief in 7:9b–11a further demonstrates Paul's use of the Greco-Roman tradition of soul-care in order to justify the severity of the grieving letter. Godly grief and the grief of the world were

distinguished in their effects: repentance leading to salvation on the one hand, and death on the other.<sup>44</sup> Plutarch contrasts the grief that God inflicts with the pain caused by humans. God causes pain in order to bring about repentance; humans simply punish without a view to moral improvement (Plutarch, *Sera* 551C–E).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, unlike humans who get angry, cause pain, and then regret their severity (Plutarch, *Cohib. ira* 464C–D; *Sera* 550E–F; 551C; Seneca, *Ira* 2.6.2), God knows no remorse and causes no damage (Philo, *Conf.* 171). In 7:9, Paul claims that godly grief caused by the grieving letter did the church no damage.

We have moved from the epistolographic conventions of 2 Cor 1–7 to the philosophical *topos* of appropriate emotional pain in the context of moral exhortation. This is natural, because the rhetoric of conciliation draws from the philosophic tradition of soul-care. Paul had already invoked the notion of appropriate grief in 2:5–11 and emphasized that the grief inflicted by moral admonition should be combined with exhortation and affirmations of friendship. He reiterates this theme in 7:2–4, only now to ameliorate the suffering he had caused the church. In 7:3a, he denies that his speech aims to condemn his readers (*πρὸς κατάκρισιν οὐ λέγω, pros katakrisin ou legō*).<sup>46</sup> The uses of frank speech for moral edification, on the one hand, and condemnation, on the other, were well-known (Stobaeus, *Flor.* 3.13.63; Isocrates, *Paneg.* 4.130; 8.72; Philodemus, *Lib.* 37–38, IB; Lucian, *Pseudol.* 3; *Deor. conc.* 2; *Icar.* 30; Ps.-Diogenes, *Ep.* 29.2–3; Marcus Aurelius 11.6.2).<sup>47</sup> As we have seen, harsh Cynics were well-known for their unbridled use of free speech to condemn the ills of humankind. Democritus's laughter condemned humanity for its inconsistency (Ps.-Hippocrates, *Ep.* 17.40). The notion of the philosopher's rebuke of sin as the guilty verdict in a legal proceeding is found in Cynic self-description (Ps.-Heraclitus, *Epp.* 7.2; 9.8; *Gnomologium Vaticanum* 116,487). Similarly, the harsh Cynic understood bold speech as punishment of human error (Ps.-Diogenes, *Ep.* 29.1, 4; Ps.-Socrates, *Ep.* 12; Ps.-Heraclitus, *Epp.* 7.4; 9.3; Plutarch, [*Vit. X orat.*] 842D; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.22.94, 97–98; Dio Chrysostom, *Isthm.* 8).

Paul distances himself from these harsh practitioners of frank speech by opposing the excessive grief their words inflict. This brings us to the last of his rhetorical strategies in 2 Cor 1–7. Paul uses hardship lists to shape his image as a bold-speaking friend whose chief concerns are reconciliation and the salvation of his hearers.

In order to understand how the hardships in 4:7–15 shape Paul's image, I first consider his reliance on God and abasement for the sake of the church. Second Corinthians 4:5–6 anticipates the hardships in 4:7–15 by raising the issue of the source of Paul's authority. He claims not to preach himself but Jesus Christ as Lord, and himself as the church's slave. The hardships in 4:7–15 amplify these two claims. They depict the free and bold-speaking Paul, who nevertheless relies

entirely on God, not his own virtue, and who subordinates himself to the Corinthian congregation.

An ambiguity in 4:7 prepares the reader to move from the theme of God as source of power (4:8–9) to Paul’s abasement for the sake of the church (4:10–15). On the one hand, the term *θησαυρός* (*thēsauros*, “treasure”) suggests Paul’s illumined and transformed soul.<sup>48</sup> The phrase “in earthen vessels” evokes the fragility of his outer self in anticipation of 4:16–5:5, and the “transcendent power” points to God’s power to preserve the fragile Paul in the midst of hardships.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, “treasure” could also refer to Paul’s ministry. Then earthen pottery denotes the abasement he accepts for the sake of the church,<sup>50</sup> and “transcendent power” evokes the life-giving power of Paul’s ministry.<sup>51</sup> The ambiguity of 4:7 reflects the correlation of the salvation Paul has received from God and God’s salvation of humanity through Paul’s ministry (cf. 1:4; 4:1; 5:18–19).

The catalog of hardships in 4:8–9 illustrates the dangers of Paul’s ministry, his endurance, and, most of all, his source of power—God.<sup>52</sup> That Paul’s power derives not from himself but from God distinguishes him from the wise man whose authority depends upon his ability to make all things depend upon himself. By making himself dependent upon God in this way, Paul prepares for his self-presentation as a reconciler.

The hardships in 4:10–15, however, point no longer to Paul’s God-given power to endure difficulties but to endurance of ignominy and death for the sake of the church. Paul now becomes a suffering bold-speaker whose concern is the salvation of the church. The purpose clauses in 4:10–11 suggest the voluntary nature of Paul’s suffering. Moreover, if *παραδιδόμεθα* (*paradidometha*, “we hand ourselves over”) is in the middle voice, the voluntary quality of Paul’s suffering finds further emphasis.<sup>53</sup> The philanthropic aspects of Paul’s hardships come out clearly in 4:12: “So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.” The theme of Paul’s voluntary enslavement to the Corinthian church also appears in 4:15, in which he asserts that all things he does are for its sake.

In 4:16–5:5, Paul’s hardships no longer emphasize the enslavement theme but underscore his spiritual transformation. The renewal of Paul’s inner self is treated in 4:16–17, while the renewal of his outer self is expressed in 5:1–5.<sup>54</sup> In both cases, Paul calls upon, yet also modifies, the philosophic theme of hardships as the sage’s training in virtue. The theme of training is present in 4:17 when Paul claims that affliction produces glory. Yet hardships prepare a *future* weight of glory, not a sage trained and perfected in reason. Paul modifies the philosophic *topos* by stressing the eschatological dimension of the transformation that God is working in him. He does not yet possess the transformed self but points to God’s daily renewal of his inner self and God’s preparation of an eternal dwelling (cf. Phil 3:12–14). By stressing progress instead of perfection, Paul distinguishes himself from

the notion in the philosophic tradition that bold speech derived from the moral superiority of the sage.

We turn to the last hardship list in 2 Cor 1–7. In 6:3–10, Paul uses a list of hardships to commend himself to the Corinthians.<sup>55</sup> Again, we see that Paul is not satisfied simply to reproduce a philosophic *topos*. In addition to the hardships that Paul enumerates in 6:4–5, 7b–10, which portray him as courageous and steadfast, we find terms in 6:6–7a that seem anomalous: “by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God. . . .” These terms make sense if they are viewed in light of the Greco-Roman psychagogical tradition.<sup>56</sup> The phrases “truthful speech” and “genuine love” refer to frank speech. Paul describes himself, the servant of God, as a bold speaker.<sup>57</sup> Paul’s creativity here consists of introducing insights from philosophic soul-care about the way moral criticism is to be applied to avoid excessive grief.

The notion of excessive grief is present in 6:3, although modern translations and exegesis obscure it. The NRSV reads: “We are putting no obstacle [*προσκοπήν*, *proskopēn*] in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry.” Exegetes have incorrectly regarded the term *προσκοπή* as equivalent to *πρόσκομμα* (*proskomma*, “obstacle”).<sup>58</sup> A very different understanding emerges, however, if *προσκοπή* is seen in contexts associated with bold speech. In these instances, it designates arousal of hatred because of the grief inflicted by moral rebuke (Polybius 38.4.2–4; Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 2.54; Cicero, *Amic.* 88–89).<sup>59</sup> *Προσκοπή* is the alienation caused by bold speech (Isocrates, *Ep.* 9.12; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 11.9.1; Ps.-Socrates, *Ep.* 1.7; Dio Chrysostom, *Diod.* 4; Lucian, *Hermot.* 51; Aristides Rhetor, *Or.* 3.668). If this lexical insight is brought to bear on 6:3, then the reason Paul adds the phrase “so that no fault may be found with our ministry” becomes clear. According to 5:18–19, Paul’s ministry aims at reconciliation. He would subvert this purpose if his speech alienated those he aimed to win over. If his speech only caused suffering, it would be inconsistent with the ministry of reconciliation. In 6:3–10, Paul presents himself as one who combines words of truth with kindness and encouragement in order not to alienate those whom he has addressed with bold speech. Yet kindness and patience should not be mistaken for timidity, because the hardships he has endured demonstrate courage.

### *The Problem of Suffering Reconstructed: Romans 5:1–11 and 8:18–39*

No passages better demonstrate Paul’s familiarity with philosophic discourse concerning hardships and suffering than Rom 5:1–11 and 8:18–39. Familiarity is perhaps too weak a word. Paul is so acquainted with the philosophic tradition that he uses its commonplaces effortlessly. Yet Paul manipulates these common-

place sayings and ideas in order to criticize philosophy's claim about the capacity of the wise man to endure suffering. In other words, Paul both employs *and subverts* the patterned discourse of philosophy with its confidence in reason to conquer hardships.

He does this for a purpose. In place of virtue or reason as the solution to the problem of suffering, Paul advances the notion of shared suffering. Although he derives from the philosophic tradition the idea that friends share joy, suffering, and even death, Paul radically expands the pool of friends to include God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and all of creation. The controlling image in these two passages is not the sage, protected from hardships by his reason, but the friend surrounded by friends who share all things.

At first glance, Rom 5:3–4 simply reproduces the notion that hardships train the sage in virtue.<sup>60</sup> Suffering builds character (see above). Paul writes, "And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope . . ." Paul recasts this commonplace philosophical notion in a familiar rhetorical figure, climax.<sup>61</sup>

Yet some unfamiliar aspects of Paul's argument would have frustrated the ancient reader's expectations. Notice that Paul completes the climax in 5:4 by saying that "character produces hope." From the philosophic standpoint, this is an odd conclusion to an account of the way suffering builds character.<sup>62</sup> Some philosophers regarded hope as a moral disease, because hope placed happiness in externals, over which no one has control. Pursuit of externals can only lead to shame (Seneca, *Epp.* 5.7; 13.13; 23.2; 24.1; 71.14; 99.5, 13; 101.4).<sup>63</sup> Thus, by introducing hope as the product of character, Paul begins his critique of the philosophic view of suffering as the training of reason.

In its place, Paul explores the relationship between friendship and suffering. I must point out the ways Paul works the friendship motif into the argument as a replacement of philosophic reason. In 5:5 we read that hope is secure, "because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." The putative exegetical dilemma that would force a decision whether "love of God" is an objective genitive (the love we have for God) or a subjective genitive (God's love for us) likely is a false problem. The central metaphor of the sentence, love as a liquid, suggests a mutuality of love. The idea of love as a liquid poured into the heart is found in amatory literature. It depicts the beloved as the source of the lover's affection.<sup>64</sup> If Paul is using this notion of mutual love, then the reason why hope is secure and can replace reason in the face of hardships becomes clear: friendship with God means a mutual sharing of suffering and joy. Paul has already alluded to this sharing in 5:2 when he boasts on the hope of sharing the glory of God.



In 5:6–8, Paul reiterates the theme of friendship and suffering from a different angle: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” This verse echoes the philosophic idea that the ultimate proof of friendship was to undergo hardships and even to die for the friend. Paul construes Jesus’ death for others in just this way. Notice also that Jesus’ death also demonstrates God’s love (5:8). There are some important distinctions, however, which set Paul’s argument apart from the usual discussion of this matter. The philosophers were careful to put a limit on friendship. Friendship is possible only between the virtuous (see above). Jesus (and by implication God) violates this canon of friendship. Jesus dies for the weak, sinners, and enemies.

The final way Paul works the friendship motif into the argument is the repeated use of *καταλλάσσειν* (*katallassein*) in 5:9–11. This term, translated somewhat misleadingly as “to reconcile,” does not simply mean the cessation of animosity, although this is the way commentators invariably regard it. The term regularly referred to the establishment of friendship (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 8.6.7; Dio Chrysostom, *Nicom.* 11,41,47–48), and with friendship comes the notion of sharing all things. Thus, we have come again to the point that began the passage: Paul’s confidence resides in his hope of sharing God’s glory. Paul does not take the philosopher’s approach of viewing suffering as the occasion to display or to train human reason. In the last analysis, human suffering is a test of divine friendship. Will the sharing between suffering humanity and God be complete? If there is to be a human boasting in God’s glory will there also be God’s participation in human suffering?

Romans 8:18–39 makes the case for divine participation in human suffering. This passage takes up the issue of suffering, as the opening verse clearly indicates: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” There are numerous parallels between 8:18–39 and 5:1–11. The most obvious is the hardship lists in 8:35–39 that remind the reader of 5:3–4:

Who will separate [*χωρίσει*, *chōrisei*] us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors [*ὑπερνικῶμεν*, *hypernikōmen*] through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate [*χωρίσαι*, *chōrisai*] us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The items in the first list (8:35) are typical of the dangers endured by the wise man. The provocative aspect of both lists, however, is their rhetorical function. Neither list works in any of the three ways hardships were used in the ancient discourse about the wise man. Virtue is neither displayed nor trained here, nor is the philanthropy of Paul and his readers exhibited. Paul is putting these hardship lists to a novel use, and what he does not say about suffering might have seemed to his hearers to have as much importance as what he did say.

The novelty of Paul's use of these hardship lists is that he puts them in the context of friendship. Instead of calling attention to an individual's virtue or philanthropy, the lists name the things that cannot separate Paul and his readers from the love of God. Paul mentions separation twice (8:35, 39) thus putting his hearers in mind of a problem often treated in discussions of friendship (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 8.5.1; Plutarch, *Amic. mult.* 95A; Seneca, *Ep.* 55.8–11; 63.3). Separation was the greatest grief friends might suffer. Yet there was comfort. Even when physically absent from one another, friends were inseparable, because they were one soul in two bodies. Hardships in Paul's hands, then, serve the rhetorical purpose of reconstructing the problem of suffering. Suffering is not the occasion for the display or the training of virtue as would have been the case for Stoics and indeed for much of the Greco-Roman world. For Paul, hardships produce or exhibit nothing in themselves; rather, and simply, hardships do not obstruct the friendship among God, Paul, and his hearers.

Paul further challenges the understanding of suffering in the philosophic tradition when he employs the phrase "we are more than conquerors [*ὑπερνικῶμεν, hypernikōmen*] through him who loved us." To understand why this is a challenge, we need first to appreciate the claim the victory motif makes for the supremacy of reason in the face of misfortune. The victory motif was a popular metaphor in the philosophic portrayal of the wise man's superiority to hardships. The wise man conquers hardships (Seneca, *Dial.* 1.2.2; 2.10.4; *Polyb.* 17.1–2; *Helv.* 2.2), while he himself is invincible (*ἀνίκητος, anikētos*; Ps.-Diogenes, *Ep.* 33; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.18.21–23; *Ench.* 19.2; Seneca, *Ep.* 85.29; *Vit. beat.* 4.2; *Helv.* 5.5). Fortune vanquishes lesser souls (Seneca, *Helv.* 1.1). Both military and athletic victory served as a point of comparison for the sage's indomitable soul.<sup>65</sup> The victory could be over external dangers or over one's own passions.<sup>66</sup> Seneca, who used the metaphor extensively,<sup>67</sup> ends a discourse on suffering like Paul with the rhetorical flourish supplied by the victory motif:

And when will it be our privilege to despise both kinds of misfortune? When will it be our privilege, after all the passions have been subdued and brought under our control, to utter the words "I have conquered [*vici*]!"? Do you ask me whom I have conquered [*vicerim*]? Neither the Persians, nor the far-off Medes, nor the warlike race that lies beyond the

Dahae; not these, but greed, ambition, and the fear of death that has conquered the conquerors of the world [*qui victores gentium vicit*]. (Seneca, *Ep.* 71.37)

The motif emphasized the importance of placing all of one's hopes in oneself and not in others (*Ceb. Tab.* 22–24; Seneca, *Vit. beat.* 8.3). It also pointed to the capacity of reason to protect the self from every misfortune (Cicero, *Tusc.* 5.52–54; Seneca, *Epp.* 9.18–19; 78.15–21; *Dial.* 2.5.7; 2.6.6).

Paul seems to affirm the philosopher's confidence in reason by introducing the victory motif into a discussion of hardships. Nevertheless, he dismantles the philosophic view in two ways. First, he claims that "we are *more* than conquerors" (emphasis added), implying that the metaphor of victory over suffering may not be adequate. Second, victory over suffering comes not through an individual's use of reason but through friendship with God: "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (8:37). If anything is clear about the philosopher's use of the victory motif, it is this: the individual soul has within itself all that is necessary to overcome suffering. Victory through another's agency would have appeared ludicrous and an insult to the providence of God, who saw fit to place a fragment of divine reason in every human soul.

If Rom 8:35–39 is the high point of Paul's attempt to reconstruct the problem of suffering from the perspective of friendship, then Rom 8:18–34 builds up to this conclusion by advocating the power of a friend's sympathy (taken in the strong sense of co-suffering) to console the sufferer.<sup>68</sup> In these verses, Paul explores the consolation of friendship as an alternative to the philosophic method of dealing with suffering through rational control.<sup>69</sup> He portrays four agents as friends who share all things with human sufferers: creation (8:19–22), the Spirit (8:26), God (8:31–33), and Christ (8:34). Space allows only for developing the theme of shared suffering in terms of creation and the Spirit.

In 8:19–22, creation is conceptualized as a person with emotions desiring to share both in humanity's future freedom and in its present suffering. In short, creation is a friend:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains [συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει, *systemazei kai synōdinei*] until now.<sup>70</sup>

Paul draws upon motifs found in Greek literature and philosophy to portray the friendship of creation with humans. While for some modern readers it may be

reminiscent of the opening chapters of Genesis and the development of biblical themes in Jewish apocalyptic thought,<sup>71</sup> nature's subjection to futility and its bondage to decay was a stock theme in consolation philosophy (Philo, *Cher.* 77–78; Ps.-Crates, *Ep.* 35; Plutarch, [*Cons. Apoll.*] 104C–106C, 112D; Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.58–61; Seneca, *Ep.* 71.11–16; *Polyb.* 1.1–4; Menander Rhetor, *Περὶ ἐπιδεικτικῶν* 2.9).<sup>72</sup> It was thought that those grieving might derive some encouragement from the thought that all existing things must of necessity suffer and perish.

The second motif is decidedly not from philosophical sources. The characterization of nature or an aspect of nature as a person in sympathy with human suffering is an ancient literary figure known in modern parlance as the pathetic fallacy.<sup>73</sup> "Groan (στένειν, *stenein*)," and "be in anguish (ὠδίνειν, *ōdinein*)," were frequently employed in instances of the pathetic fallacy to communicate nature's sympathy and mourning for human suffering (*Greek Anthology* 7.10, 142, 241, 268, 292, 328, 393, 468, 476, 481, 547, 549, 599, 633; 8.3; Bion, *Epitaph. Adon.* 35).<sup>74</sup> Creation is a friend, groaning over humanity's suffering, subject to the same futility, yet hoping to share in the same freedom and glory.

In 8:26, we discover that the Spirit also groans. This is a remarkable statement, but fits with the overall purpose of the passage to assert the shared sufferings of friends as an alternative to consolation through rational self-control. The moral philosophers condemned groaning (στεναγμός, *stenagmos*) as a sign of weakness and the lack of reason (Plutarch, [*Cons. Apoll.*] 113A; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.6.16–17). No good man ever groans (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.1.12, 22; 1.6.29). It is a disgrace to groan (Cicero, *Tusc.* 2.30–33). Groaning must be resisted (Cicero, *Tusc.* 2.42–50). Paul, on the other hand, makes this particularly acute form of grief part of the Spirit's experience.<sup>75</sup> The Spirit shares human groaning and is therefore in solidarity with humanity. God's friendship with humanity is implied in suffering the loss of the Son, or more accurately, in handing the Son over to death (8:32). Finally, the circle of friends is completed. As in the case of 5:6–8, Christ's friendship is demonstrated through his death for others (8:34; see above). Paul's reconstruction of the problem of suffering is finished. He has employed rhetorical forms and commonplace ideas associated with philosophy's confidence that reason conquers suffering. Yet he has disarmed that confidence. In place of the virtue of self-control, he has advocated the shared suffering of friends, and the circle of Paul's friends includes all of creation and the divine community.

### Part III. Other Relevant Pauline and Paulinist Texts

Rom 2:9, 15; 7:24; 8:17; 9:1–3; 12:12, 15, 21; 15:1–3, 30

1 Cor 4:9–12, 21; 5:2; 7:35; 12:25–26; 13:3; 15:30–33

2 Cor 2:12–16; 5:14–21; 8:2; 11:23–33; 12:7–10; 12:21

- Gal 6:2  
 Phil 3:18  
 1 Thess 1:6; 2:1–2, 7–8, 13–16; 3:3–5; 4:13–18; 5:8, 14  
 2 Thess 1:4–10  
 Col 1:24  
 Eph 3:13; 6:10–17  
 1 Tim 1:18–20; 4:10  
 2 Tim 1:8–2:13; 3:10–13; 4:6–8

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## Notes

1. A. Glibert-Thirry, *Pseudo-Andronicus De Rhodes: ΠΕΠΙ ΠΑΘΩΝ* (Corpus latinum commentariorum in aristotelem graecorum, Supplement 2; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 223.
2. Cicero limited the topic in the same way. See A. Erskine, "Cicero and the Expression of Grief," in *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (ed. S. M. Braund and C. Gill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41–42.
3. See M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 1:149; 2:77.
4. Philo (*Leg.* 3.111) cites what appears to have been a standard definition: "groaning is intense and excessive sorrow [λύπη, *lypē*]." Unless otherwise indicated, texts and translations of ancient works are from the Loeb Classical Library.
5. If we associate soul shrinkage with grief, we are more likely to recognize allusions to emotional pain in Paul's letters. In addition to the words with the root *sten*, contraction of soul is present in the following terms in the Pauline epistles; note, however, that the English translations provided by the various modern versions (the NRSV is cited here) fail to convey the physiological aspect of the emotion: "affliction" (θλίψις, *thlipsis*; e.g., Rom 5:3; 8:35; 2 Cor 1:4, 6, 8; 2:4); "anguish of heart" (συναχγή καρδιάς, *synochē kardias*; 2 Cor 2:4); "faint-hearted" (ὀλιγόψυχος, *oligopsychos*; 1 Thess 1:14).
6. Glibert-Thirry, *Pseudo-Andronicus De Rhodes*, 227, my translation.
7. See A. C. van Geytenbeek, *Musonius Rufus and Greek Diatribe* (Wijsgerige Teksten en Studies 8; Assen, the Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1963), 138. See also Plato, *Gorg.* 472D–479D; Isocrates, *Nic.* 53; Juvenal, *Sat.* 13.192–198.
8. See H. Deku, "Selbstbestrafung: Marginalien zu einem sehr alten, aber noch nicht ganz lexikonreifen Begriff," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 21 (1977): 42–58. See also Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.22.35; *Ench.* 34; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.12.55; Marcus Aurelius, 8.53; 12.16; Lucian, *Merc. cond.* 42; 1 John 3:19–22.
9. John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS 99; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). Critics of Fitzgerald underestimate the power of the Greek philosophical tradition on the Jewish sources that, it is claimed, were more of an influence on Paul. Furthermore, they fail to understand Fitzgerald's main contribution, to show how the rhetorical use of hardship lists flowed out of the central teachings of the philosophers on the relation between virtue and endurance. See, for example, N. Willert, "The Catalogues of Hardships in the Pauline Correspondence: Background and Function," in *The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism* (ed. P. Borgen and S. Giversen; Århus, Denmark: Århus, 1995), 217–43.
10. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 115.
11. *Ibid.*, 51–55.
12. See J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 77–98.
13. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 55–70.
14. See N. C. Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12.1–13 in Its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (SNTSMS 98; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139–59.

15. See R. Höistad, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King* (Lund, Sweden: Carl Blom, 1948), 97. For the readiness of the wise man to suffer indignities for the good of others, see Antisthenes, *frgs.* 14.5–6; 15.5, 9. See H. D. Rankin, *Antisthenes Sokraticos* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1986), 168–70.

16. For the dangers faced by bold speakers, see Lucian, *Pisc.* 20; *Peregr.* 32. See A. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 38.

17. See Höistad, *Cynic Hero*, 195–96.

18. For Cynic misanthropy, see G. A. Gerhard, *Phoinix von Kolophon: Texte und Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909), 39, 165–67, 170–75.

19. Ps.-Hippocrates, *Ep.* 17.40 (in R. Hercher, *Epistolographi Graeci* [Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965], 303).

20. See Gerhard, *Phoinix von Kolophon*, 32–45.

21. See A. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 21–28.

22. For the Epicurean care of souls, see C. E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (NovTSup 81; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 101–81. Note the emphasis on reason, truth, and bold speech in Lucian's (*Alex.* 47) account of the Epicurean path to tranquillity; no mention is made of a conversion involving pain, leading in turn to repentance.

23. See I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), 71–78.

24. See H. G. Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele* (*Hypomnemata* 34; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 74–90.

25. Ps.-Libanius, *Charact.* *Ep.* 43. Text and translation is A. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (SBLBS 19; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 72–73.

26. For expressions of grief as moral condemnation in the philosophic tradition, see the Cynic appropriation of Heraclitus and the philosophers who imitated his gloominess: Ps.-Heraclitus, *Epp.* 5.3; 7.2–10; Lucian, *Demon.* 6; *Vit. auct.* 7; *Fug.* 18.

27. For other examples of the grieving style, see Julian, *Ep.* 68; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epp.* 7, 16; Basil, *Epp.* 45, 156, 204, 207, 212, 223, 224, 270.

28. *Menandri sententiae* 370. In the same work we read, "Suppose all the burdens of friends to be in common" (534), and, "When a friend suffers with a friend he suffers with himself" (803; my translations; see also 543K).

29. Both Plato (*Symp.* 179B–180B) and Seneca (*Ep.* 9.10–12) recognize blurring in the distinction between friendship and erotic love when it comes to dying for a friend.

30. S. Farron, *Vergil's Aeneid: A Poem of Love and Grief* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 19n. 5.

31. See C. K. Barrett, "O ΔΙΚΗΣΑΣ (2 Cor 7.12)," in *Verborum Veritas: Festschrift für Gustav Stählin* (ed. O. Böcher and K. Haacker; Wuppertal, Germany: Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, 1970), 149–57.

32. V. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB 32A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 54–55, 143.

33. Barrett, "O ΔΙΚΗΣΑΣ," 149–52.

34. For arguments against identifying the letter with either 1 Corinthians or 2 Cor 10–13, see Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 163–68.

35. *Ibid.*, 367–71.

36. D. Fredrickson, "Πάρρησις in the Pauline Epistles," in *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World* (ed. J. Fitzgerald; NovTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 180.

37. Ancient exegetes viewed ἐπιτιμία here as ἐπιτίμησις and thus an aspect of moral exhortation. See, for example, Chrysostom, *Hom. 4 in 2 Cor.* 4 (PG 61.422).

38. For the goals of moral exhortation, and rebuke in particular, see Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung*, 168–69. Philodemus (*Lib.* 31, 82, XXIVA) understands ἐπιτίμησις as a form of frank speech.

39. See A. Malherbe, "'Pastoral Care' in the Thessalonian Church," *NTS* 36 (1990): 381–85.

40. For rebuke leading to shame and suicide, see Plutarch, *Adul. amic.* 70F–71C.

41. R. L. Fowler ("The Rhetoric of Desperation," *HSCP* 91 [1987]: 6–38) has identified a rhetorical form employed from Homer to Roman times, which he has named "desperation speech." Its identifying marks include indication of the extreme weight of suffering borne by the speaker, the impossibility of a solution (ἀπορία, *aporia*), questioning whether life is any longer possible, not knowing whether to choose life or death, and an exclamation about how wretched one has become (parodied in Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.12.27). In addition to 2 Cor 1:8, two other passages in Paul fit this form very well: Rom 7:24–25 and Phil 1:21–26. Fowler (27–31) calls attention to the fact that Euripides introduces the sympathy of friends as a solution to the *aporia* of the speaker. Similarly, Paul introduces the notion of friendship in each instance of his use of desperation speech.

42. Friends have like emotions (see Plutarch, *Adul. amic.* 51E; *Amic. mult.* 97A). Friendship comes into being through likeness, and this includes the identity of emotions (see Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 8.3.6–7; Plutarch, *Amic. mult.* 96E–F; Cicero, *Amic.* 50).

43. D. Fredrickson, "Paul's Sentence of Death (2 Corinthians 1:9)," in *God, Evil, and Suffering: Essays in Honor of Paul R. Sponheim* (ed. T. Fretheim and C. Thompson; Word and World Supplement Series 4; St. Paul, Minn.: Word & World, 2000), 103–7.

44. "Worldly grief" recalls Paul's description in 2:7 of the grief suffered by "the one who caused injury."

45. For the role of emotional pain or grief in God's intention to bring about moral reform, see Plutarch, *Sera* 549F–550A; 550E–F; 551C–E. Cf. Philo, *Det.* 144–146; *Conf.* 180–182; *Somm.* 1.91; Heb 12:10–11; Rev 3:19.

46. Other interpreters (e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [BNTC; London: Black, 1973], 203; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 369) regard this phrase as Paul's attempt to mitigate the severity of the previous denials (7:2), which they view as his accusations against the church.

47. See Gerhard, *Phoinix von Kolophon*, 36.

48. For the soul as treasure, see Philo, *Leg.* 3.104–106; *Cher.* 48; *Det.* 35, 43; *Deus* 42, 91–93; *Sobr.* 41, 68; *Conf.* 69; Plutarch, *An. corp.* 500D; Seneca, *Ep.* 92.31–32. Barrett (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 137) gives good reasons to believe that Paul is alluding to his illumined soul; in the end, however, like other interpreters he does not come to this conclusion for fear of turning Paul's anthropology over to Hellenistic ideas about the body and soul. For Paul's ability to manipulate philosophic terminology, see n. 54 below.



49. So Fitzgerald, *Cracks in Earthen Vessels*, 167–69.

50. See H. B. Walters, *History of Ancient Pottery: Greek, Etruscan, and Roman* (2 vols.; London: Murray, 1905), 1:135–36; 2:455, 479. Cf. Rom 9:21 and esp. 2 Tim 2:20.

51. The power of God to give life through Paul's ministry is the theme of 5:12. Cf. 2 Cor 1:6; Gal 3:5; Phil 2:13; 1 Thess 2:13. For a similar notion, in the philosophic tradition, of divine power, see Dio Chrysostom, *Alex.* 15.

52. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in Earthen Vessels*, 169–76. Fitzgerald believes, however, that the divine power in Paul's weakness in 4:8–9 is "one of the ways in which the Corinthians are to know that he has been commissioned by God and the word that he speaks comes from God (172)." I would assert that Paul distinguishes himself from the popular conception of the philosopher, whose claim to authority rested on his own power.

53. So *ibid.*, 180.

54. For Paul's use and critique in 2 Cor 4:16–5:5 of philosophic commonplaces such as "body as temporary dwelling" and "death as stripping the soul of the body," see D. Fredrickson, "Paul Playfully on Time and Eternity," *Dialog* 39 (2000): 21–23. For these commonplaces incorporated into discussions of hardships and suffering, see Seneca, *Epp.* 24.17–21; 92.30–35; 102.21–30; 120.13–19.

55. The view that 6:3–10 is apologetic has been challenged with good reason by Fitzgerald (*Cracks in Earthen Vessels*, 187–88). He has demonstrated (191–201) that 6:3–10 reflects the philosophic use of hardships to depict the sage's courage and constancy. I disagree, however, with his view that Paul's self-commendation fosters his hearers' confidence in him. Something more specific is at stake, namely, the integrity of the flexible approach to the care of souls suggested in 6:6–7. The constancy of Paul portrayed in 6:7–10 guards against any accusation that his gentleness is flattery. For the theme of adaptability in the care of souls, see Glad, *Paul and Philodemus*, 15–98.

56. Fredrickson, "Πόρρησία in the Pauline Epistles," 179–80.

57. *Ibid.*, 179.

58. See, for example, R. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986), 170–71.

59. For the sense of hatred, see SVF 3.102.40; Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.23–24; 4.26; Seneca, *Ep.* 14.7.

60. Substitute "Christian" for "sage" and you have Paul's meaning. So C. H. Talbert, *Learning through Suffering: The Educational Value of Suffering in the New Testament and in Its Milieu* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1991), 21–22.

61. J. Wettstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Ex officina Dommeriana, 1752; reprint, Graz, Germany: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1962), 46.

62. A similar surprise awaits the reader in 1 Thess 5:8. The "armor of the sage" constructed out of reason was a widespread philosophic motif. See Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 95–103. Paul subverts the image, however, by constructing the armor out of faith, love, and hope. These make a person vulnerable to realities external to the soul. Paul's earliest interpreters were not so eager to abandon reason. Note the more conventional construction of armor in Eph 6:10–17 and 1 Tim 1:18.

63. Nevertheless, Paul's appeal to hope in affliction has parallels. For example, Menander (813K) writes, "In adversity a man is saved by hope." Does Rom 8:24a echo this saying? Cicero (*Amic.* 23, 59) believes that friendship provides hope for the future and does not let the spirit grow faint. This connection between friendship and hope is crucial for Rom 5 and 8.

64. See notes by M. Davies, *Hermes* 111 (1983): 496–97, and O. Vox, *Hermes* 120 (1992): 375–76. For additional examples, see D. Sider, *The Epigrams of Philodemus: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 95–97.

65. Athletic victory: Ps.-Diogenes, *Ep.* 31; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.24.1–2; 3.25.1–6; 4.4.30–32; Philo, *Agr.* 110–21; *Mut.* 82.1; *Prob.* 26–27, 110–12. Military victory: Ps.-Diogenes, *Ep.* 5; and most of the instances in Seneca, including *Polyb.* 15.3; 16.3.

66. Victory over external hardships: Seneca, *Epp.* 98.12, 14; 104.27. Victory over passions: *SVF* 3.129.9; Ps.-Heraclitus, *Ep.* 4.3; Philo, *Abr.* 48–49; Epictetus, *Ench.* 34. External and internal are brought together in Ps.-Diogenes, *Ep.* 12; Cicero, *Tusc.* 2.63.

67. For a brief account, see C. E. Manning, *On Seneca's "Ad Marciam"* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 62. Seneca reserves the victory motif for a final flourish in *Ep.* 67, a discourse on the endurance of hardships.

68. Compared with the other techniques for mitigating emotional pain, which focused on the irrationality of grief, a friend's sympathy was a little-utilized theme in Greco-Roman consolatory literature. See J. H. D. Scourfield, *Consoling Heliodorus: A Commentary on Jerome, Letter 60* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 81. A few examples can be located: Plutarch, [*Cons. Apoll.*] 102A; Seneca, *Polyb.* 12.2. For the rational therapy of grief in philosophic consolation, see H.-T. Johann, *Trauer und Trost: Eine quellen- und strukturanalytische Untersuchung der philosophischen Trostschriften über Tod* (*Studia et Testamonia Antiqua* 5; Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1968), and R. C. Gregg, *Consolation Philosophy: Greek and Christian Paideia in Basil and the Two Gregories* (*Patristic Monograph Series* 3; Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975). Outside of the philosophic writings, however, the notion that sharing emotional pain has consolatory power appears to have been widespread. See J. H. M. Strubbe, "Epigrams and Consolation Decrees for Deceased Youth," *L'Antiquité classique* 67 (1998): 45–75. Stobaeus (*Flor.* 5.48.16–31) provides a collection of texts around this theme.

69. We can be certain that Paul was aware of the forms of philosophic consolation, since he adopts some of them. See Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians*, 57–58, and idem, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 64–66.

70. The NRSV's "in labor pains" is too free a translation of *συνῳδίει* (*synōdinei*). The verbal aspect needs to be retained, and it is debatable whether the birth imagery should be given such emphasis. The term *ῳδίνω* (*ōdinō*) in the sense of "I am in anguish" was employed with "I groan" (*στένω*, *stenō*) in epitaphs without calling attention to birth imagery. The early association of the term with birth pain is no indication of actual usage in a later period.

71. O. Christoffersson, *The Earnest Expectation of the Creature: The Flood-Tradition as Matrix of Romans 8:18–27* (*ConBNT* 23; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 129–32.

72. See Johann, *Trauer und Trost*, 63–67, 119–64.

73. J. L. Buller, "The Pathetic Fallacy in Hellenistic Pastoral," *Ramus* 10 (1981): 35–52; J. M. Hurwitt, "Palm Trees and the Pathetic Fallacy in Archaic Greek Poetry and Art," *CJ* 77 (1982): 193–99; C. Segal, "Dissonant Sympathy: Song, Orpheus, and the Golden Ages in Seneca's Tragedies," *Ramus* 12 (1983): 229–51; J. D. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna: The Fragments and the Adonis* (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentary 33; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125, 215–16.

74. Nature's sympathy for human suffering should not be confused with the Stoic doctrine of συμπάθεια (*sympatheia*), which taught the impersonal, causal interconnection of all things. See H. R. Neuenschwander, *Mark Aurels Beziehungen zu Seneca und Poseidonios* (Noctes Romanae 3; Stuttgart: Paul Haupt, 1951), 14–23.

75. For groaning as a type of grief, see above, n. 4.