

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF SUFFERING IN PAULINE THEOLOGY
AND THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS**

by

Philipp Berner

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Supervisor: Dr Timothy Churchill

Declaration

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Philipp Berner,
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Table of Contents

ABBREVIATIONS
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Background and value of the study.....	1
1.2. The research problem	2
1.2.1. Main problem and key questions.....	2
1.2.2. Delimitations of the study	2
1.3. Objectives of the study	3
1.4. Research design and methodology.....	4
1.5. Hypothesis	5
CHAPTER 2: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF KEY PAULINE PASSAGES ON SUFFERING	6
2.1. Introduction.....	6
2.2. Historical-cultural background of Paul's theology of suffering.....	6
2.2.1. The cultural milieu of Paul's time.....	6
2.2.1.1. <i>Jewish view on suffering</i>	<i>6</i>
2.2.1.2. <i>Greco-Roman view on suffering.....</i>	<i>8</i>
2.2.1.3. <i>Christian suffering at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders</i>	<i>10</i>
2.2.1.4. <i>Christian suffering at the hands of the Romans.....</i>	<i>11</i>
2.2.1.5. <i>The use of suffering as a rhetorical device in Greco-Roman letter writing.....</i>	<i>13</i>
2.2.2. General background and historical context of 2 Corinthians and Philippians	16
2.2.2.1. <i>Second Corinthians.....</i>	<i>16</i>
2.2.2.2. <i>Philippians.....</i>	<i>17</i>
2.3. Exegetical study of four key Pauline passages on suffering.....	18
2.3.1. Second Corinthians 1:3-11	18

2.3.1.1. <i>Literary context</i>	18
2.3.1.2. <i>Verse-by-verse analysis</i>	19
2.3.1.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	26
2.3.2. Second Corinthians 4:7-18.....	27
2.3.2.1. <i>Literary context</i>	27
2.3.2.2. <i>Verse-by-verse analysis</i>	28
2.3.2.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	34
2.3.3. Second Corinthians 12:1-10.....	35
2.3.3.1. <i>Literary context</i>	35
2.3.3.2. <i>Verse-by-verse analysis</i>	36
2.3.3.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	42
2.3.4. Philippians 1:18b-24.....	44
2.3.4.1. <i>Literary context</i>	44
2.3.4.2. <i>Verse-by-verse analysis</i>	44
2.3.4.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	48
2.4. Survey of other relevant Pauline texts on suffering	49
2.4.1. Suffering on account of Christ.....	49
2.4.2. Suffering as completing Christ's afflictions	50
2.4.3. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life.....	51
2.4.4. Suffering for the benefit of the church	52
2.4.5. Suffering as an opportunity to experience, paradoxically, God's power ..	53
2.4.6. Suffering as an opportunity to experience God's comfort.....	54
2.4.7. Suffering produces eternal benefits for the believer.....	55
2.4.8. Future hope in suffering	56
2.4.9. Suffering works together for the believer's good	58
2.4.10. The believer's appropriate response to suffering	60
2.5. Conclusion	60
CHAPTER 3: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF KEY PASSAGES ON SUFFERING IN THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS	64
3.1. Introduction	64
3.2. Historical-cultural background of the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering	64
3.2.1. The cultural milieu of the Apostolic Fathers.....	64
3.2.1.1. <i>Christian suffering at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders</i>	64

3.2.1.2. <i>Christian suffering at the hands of the Romans</i>	65
3.2.2. General background and historical context of 1 Clement, Romans, Smyrnaeans and Philippians.....	67
3.2.2.1. <i>First Clement</i>	67
3.2.2.2. <i>Romans</i>	68
3.2.2.3. <i>Smyrnaeans</i>	69
3.2.2.4. <i>Philippians</i>	69
3.3. Exegetical study of four key passages on suffering in the Apostolic Fathers.....	70
3.3.1. First Clement 45:7b-8.....	70
3.3.1.1. <i>Literary context</i>	70
3.3.1.2. <i>Verse-by-verse analysis</i>	71
3.3.1.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	72
3.3.2. Romans 5:1-3.....	73
3.3.2.1. <i>Literary context</i>	73
3.3.2.2. <i>Verse-by-verse analysis</i>	74
3.3.2.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	79
3.3.3. Smyrnaeans 4:2	80
3.3.3.1. <i>Literary context</i>	80
3.3.3.2. <i>Verse analysis</i>	81
3.3.3.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	83
3.3.4. Philippians 8:2-9:2.....	84
3.3.4.1. <i>Literary context</i>	84
3.3.4.2. <i>Verse-by-verse analysis</i>	84
3.3.4.3. <i>Conclusion</i>	87
3.4. Survey of other relevant texts on suffering in the Apostolic Fathers	88
3.4.1. Suffering on account of Christ	88
3.4.2. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life and thus a demonstration of his Christianity	88
3.4.3. Martyrdom as the way to true discipleship	90
3.4.4. Death as a preferable option	91
3.4.5. Suffering as an evidence of Christ's humanity	92
3.4.6. Suffering for the benefit of others	93
3.4.7. Suffering as a blessing to the church	94

3.4.8. Suffering and martyrdom as a privilege.....	94
3.4.9. Future hope in suffering	95
3.4.10. The believer's appropriate response to suffering	97
3.5. Conclusion	98
CHAPTER 4: AN EVALUATION OF PAUL'S AND THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS'	
UNDERSTANDING OF SUFFERING.....	101
4.1. Introduction.....	101
4.2. Strengths of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering ..	101
4.2.1. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life.....	101
4.2.2. Correction of a negative perception of suffering by emphasising its various benefits and good purposes	103
4.2.3. Future hope in suffering	105
4.2.4. Focus on the character of God.....	106
4.2.5. Provision of practical examples to follow.....	107
4.2.6. Supplying the motivation for the endurance of suffering	108
4.3. Possible weaknesses of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering	108
4.3.1. The role of the readers in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7	108
4.3.2. Ignatius' notion of true discipleship through martyrdom	109
4.3.3. Insufficient focus on the character of God.....	110
4.4. Conclusion	111
CHAPTER 5: THE TWO THEOLOGIES OF SUFFERING IN COMPARISON	113
5.1. Introduction.....	113
5.2. Most significant commonalities between the two theologies of suffering	113
5.2.1. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life.....	113
5.2.2. Suffering for the benefit of others/the church	114
5.2.3. Future hope in suffering	114
5.2.4. The believer's appropriate response to suffering	115
5.3. Other commonalities between the two theologies of suffering	115
5.3.1. Suffering on account of Christ.....	115
5.3.2. Death as a preferable option.....	116
5.3.3. Suffering as an opportunity to experience, paradoxically, God's power	116
5.3.4. Suffering produces eternal benefits for the believer.....	117
5.3.5. Suffering works together for the believer's good	117

5.3.6. Suffering as a privilege.....	117
5.3.7. The unpleasant side of suffering	117
5.4. Most significant differences between the two theologies of suffering .	118
5.4.1. Suffering as an opportunity to experience, paradoxically, God's power	118
5.4.2. Suffering works together for the believer's good	119
5.4.3. Martyrdom as the way to true discipleship	120
5.5. Plausible reasons for the three major differences	120
5.5.1. The paradox of divine power in human weakness	120
5.5.2. Suffering working together for the believer's good	122
5.5.3. Martyrdom as the way to true discipleship	122
5.6. Other differences between the two theologies of suffering	123
5.6.1. Suffering on account of Christ.....	123
5.6.2. Suffering as completing Christ's afflictions	124
5.6.3. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life and thus a demonstration of his Christianity	124
5.6.4. Death as a preferable option.....	124
5.6.5. Suffering as an evidence of Jesus' humanity	125
5.6.6. Suffering for the benefit of others/the church	126
5.6.7. Suffering as an opportunity to experience God's comfort.....	126
5.6.8. Suffering produces eternal benefits for the believer.....	127
5.6.9. Suffering and martyrdom as a privilege.....	127
5.6.10. Future hope in suffering	128
5.6.11. The believer's appropriate response to suffering.....	129
5.7. Conclusion	130
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	133
6.1. Review of the research	133
6.2. Paul's theology of suffering	134
6.3. The Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering	135
6.4. An evaluation of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' understanding of suffering	137
6.5. The two theologies of suffering in comparison.....	138
6.6. Assessing the hypothesis	139
APPENDIX	141
WORKS CITED	148

Abbreviations

<i>Abraham</i>	Philo; <i>On the Life of Abraham</i>
<i>Ab urbe cond.</i>	Livy; <i>The History of Rome</i>
<i>Ag.</i>	Aeschylus; <i>Agamemnon</i>
<i>Amic.</i>	Cicero; <i>De amicitia</i>
<i>Amic. mult.</i>	Plutarch; <i>De amicorum multitudine</i>
<i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus; <i>Annales</i>
<i>Apol.</i>	Tertullian; <i>Apologeticus</i>
<i>Att.</i>	Cicero; <i>Epistulae ad Atticum</i>
AYBD	Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary
BDAG	Bauer W and Danker FW (ed.) 2000. <i>A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature</i> (3 rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
<i>Claud.</i>	Suetonius; <i>Divus Claudius</i>
<i>1 Clem.</i>	1 Clement
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
<i>Curses</i>	Philo; <i>On Curses</i>
<i>Diatr.</i>	Epictetus; <i>Diatribai</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Seneca; <i>Epistulae morales</i>
<i>Ep. Tra.</i>	Pliny the Younger; <i>Epistulae ad Trajanum</i>
<i>Eth. nic.</i>	Aristotle; <i>Nichomachean Ethics</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>Fam.</i>	Cicero; <i>Epistulae ad familiares</i>
<i>Har. resp.</i>	Cicero; <i>De haruspicum responso</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius; <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Ign. Eph.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Ephesians</i>

Ign. <i>Magn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Magnesians</i>
Ign. <i>Phld.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Philadelphians</i>
Ign. <i>Pol.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To Polycarp</i>
Ign. <i>Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Romans</i>
Ign. <i>Smyrn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>
Ign. <i>Trall.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Trallians</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian; <i>Institutio oratoria</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus; <i>Jewish War</i>
KJB	King James Bible
LBD	Lexham Bible Dictionary
L&N	Louw JP and Nida EA 1996. <i>Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains</i> (2 nd ed.). New York: United Bible Societies.
2 Macc	2 Maccabees
4 Macc	4 Maccabees
<i>Mart. Pol.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Polycarp</i>
NASB	New American Standard Bible
<i>Prelim. Studies</i>	Philo; <i>On the Preliminary Studies</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	Seneca; <i>De providentia</i>
<i>Providence</i>	Philo; <i>On Providence</i>
<i>Pol. Phil</i>	Polycarp, <i>To the Philippians</i>
4QDibHam	<i>Words of the Luminaries</i> ^a
<i>Rewards</i>	Philo; <i>On Rewards and Punishments</i>
Sir	Sirach
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations are derived from the ESV translation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background and value of the study

This comparative study of suffering in Pauline theology and the Apostolic Fathers stems, on the one hand, from my fascination with Paul's extraordinary view about suffering, which often differs greatly from the viewpoint of believers today, and, on the other hand, from my curiosity regarding how these ideas about suffering were maintained and modified by some of the most influential Christian leaders during the decades after Paul.

One of the theological values of this research paper is its construction of two theologies of suffering – one of Paul and another of the Apostolic Fathers. Insights on their understanding of suffering will be discovered through a number of exegeses on key passages and a brief survey of other texts on suffering. In addition, it should become clear, through the comparative study, how the Apostolic Fathers' perspectives and attitudes concerning suffering differed from Paul's. It needs to be noted that a good number of scholarly works have already been written about various aspects of suffering in Paul's letters and, although to a lesser degree, of suffering in the Apostolic Fathers. Some comparative studies have been composed as well¹ and

¹ For instance, Bird and Dodson (2011:51-56) conduct a brief comparative study between Paul's and Ignatius' theology of suffering and martyrdom. Similarly, Still and Wilhite (2017:136-142) compare these two authors' understanding of suffering and death. Gregory and Tuckett (2005:363-370) compare the theme of suffering in Paul's Philippians with that in Polycarp's Philippians.

it is my aim to build on the work of these scholars.

Regarding its practical value, it is my hope that this study will help believers to learn from the extraordinary examples of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers, that is, that they will learn to view suffering and respond to it as they did. This would greatly benefit those believers who have a distorted perspective on suffering and thus may respond to it in inappropriate ways – such as I often do (e.g., with self-pity, blame, doubt and a lack of trust in God). Furthermore, I trust that this research paper will to some degree aid believers to provide godly counsel to those who suffer.

1.2. The research problem

1.2.1. Main problem and key questions

The research will examine in what ways the theology of suffering in the Apostolic Fathers corresponds to and differs from Paul's theology of suffering. In order to achieve this task, four key questions must be answered:

- a) What is the historical-cultural background of Paul's theology of suffering and what would an exegetical study on key texts reveal about the concept of suffering in the Pauline corpus?
- b) What is the historical-cultural background of the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering and what would an exegetical study on key texts reveal about the concept of suffering in the Apostolic Fathers?
- c) What are the strengths and perceived weaknesses of the understanding of suffering in the Pauline corpus and the Apostolic Fathers?
- d) In what ways does suffering in the Apostolic Fathers correspond to and differ from Paul's theology of suffering?

1.2.2. Delimitations of the study

While the title of this research paper reveals that a comparative study of suffering is presented, not all passages on suffering will be treated. Four delimitations will be set on the topic of suffering: first, I shall not treat passages on suffering in relation to unbelievers, and second, I will not explore the passages on Christ's suffering. My

research paper will instead focus on suffering in relation to believers. Texts on the suffering of Christ will only be discussed if they are directly relevant to the suffering of believers (e.g., Paul's sharing in Christ's suffering in 2 Corinthians 1:5). Third, I will not consider passages in which the suffering of the believer clearly occurs as a form of God's discipline for committed sins. And fourth, while I will analyse the verses which present various truths about the believer's suffering and which feature instructions regarding how he should deal with these difficult situations, I will not examine the verses that instruct the believer how he should respond to the people who cause him to suffer.

Another delimitation is set in regard to the Apostolic Fathers: although, for simplicity, the title includes the general term 'Apostolic Fathers', my research paper will only examine the writings of three Apostolic Fathers – Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp. Thus, when I write of the Apostolic Fathers throughout my research paper, I refer specifically to these three.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this research paper correlate to the above stated main problem and subsequent key questions – the primary objective is to discover in what ways suffering in the Apostolic Fathers corresponds to and differs from Paul's theology of suffering. In order to accomplish this primary objective, four secondary objectives are put in place, namely, to:

- α) Determine the historical-cultural background of Paul's theology of suffering and establish, through an exegetical study, how such a Pauline theology of suffering looks like.
- β) Determine the historical-cultural background of the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering and discover, through an exegetical study, the various features of their theology of suffering.
- χ) Deduce the strengths and perceived weaknesses of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering.
- δ) Compare the two theologies of suffering in order to discover their

commonalities and differences.

1.4. Research design and methodology

This research paper consists of six chapters. Four chapters (chaps 2-5) constitute the paper's body and each of these chapters answers one of the four key questions. Chapter 2, which establishes a Pauline theology of suffering, and chapter 3, in which a theology of suffering of the Apostolic Fathers is constructed, will follow the same outline and employ the same methodologies: each of the two chapters first examines the historical-cultural background of the respective theology of suffering, then presents an exegetical study on several key passages on suffering, and finally surveys the remaining texts on the topic. In order to explore the historical-cultural background of Paul's (in chapter 2) and the Apostolic Fathers' (in chapter 3) theology of suffering, I shall examine the cultural milieu within which they laboured and, in preparation for the exegetical study that follows, investigate the general background and historical context of 2 Corinthians and Philippians (in chapter 2), and of 1 Clement, Romans, Smyrnaeans and Philippians (in chapter 3). I will then analyse four key passages on suffering in the Pauline epistles (in chapter 2), namely, 2 Corinthians 1:3-10, 4:7-18 and 12:1-10, as well as Philippians 1:18b-24, and four key passages on suffering in the Apostolic Fathers' writings (in chapter 3), namely, 1 Clement 45:7b-8, Romans 5:1-3, Smyrnaeans 4:2 and Philippians 8:2-9:2. These eight texts were chosen because they treat the topic of suffering most extensively: they are among the longest passages about the believer's suffering in the writings of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers, and at the same time they are diverse, containing different (and often key) ideas and concepts about the suffering of the believer (and thus, key words related to the topic such as 'comfort', 'rely' (on God), 'deliverance', 'death', 'life', 'weakness', 'power', 'disciple' and 'endurance' are located in these texts). In addition, these passages are representative of their authors' teaching about suffering elsewhere in their letters.

The literary context of each text will be inspected and the author's flow of thought within the passage and its wider pericope will be studied. A verse-by-verse in-depth analysis follows, with the purpose of discovering the text's author-intended meaning. Here I will examine the syntax, conduct word studies on key words and observe the

various employed rhetorical devices. These exegetical findings will be supplemented with a survey of other relevant texts on suffering in Paul's letters (in chapter 2) and in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (in chapter 3). In order to determine its meaning, each text will be analysed in its historical-cultural and literary context. The final part of each chapter will gather the data derived from the exegetical analysis and the survey, categorise this data and summarise it.

Chapter 4 evaluates the understanding of suffering in the writings of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers. The different facets of each theology of suffering, as discovered in chapters 2-3, are examined and evaluated in light of the original readers' historical-cultural background, in order to determine each theology's strengths and possible weaknesses. I shall first deal with those aspects that would have had a positive effect on the original readers and then discuss those aspects that would have (possibly) affected the original readers negatively.

Chapter 5 compares, based on the findings of chapters 2-3, Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering. The chapter first describes their commonalities and then discusses their various differences – both, their differing overall emphases, as well as the smaller details that vary. I will conclude this chapter by briefly addressing the plausible explanations that account for some of the differences between the two theologies of suffering, keeping in mind the historical-cultural background discussed in chapters 2-3.

Chapter 6, which is the conclusion of this research paper, presents a short summary of the conducted research and reports the most significant findings. In addition, the hypothesis stated below will be briefly assessed.

1.5. Hypothesis

While the believer's future hope is the most extensively shared feature in Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering, the major differences between the two theologies are (1) the Pauline theme of 'power in weakness', which is nearly absent in the Apostolic Fathers, and (2) the repeated Ignatian idea of becoming a better disciple through martyrdom, which is completely absent in Paul's letters.

Chapter 2

An exegetical study of key Pauline passages on suffering

2.1. Introduction

This chapter, which consists of three parts, examines what Paul writes about suffering – with the aim to discover, as much as possible, his views of and responses to suffering. The chapter first treats several issues regarding the historical-cultural background of his theology of suffering, then presents an exegetical study on four key Pauline passages on the topic (2 Cor 1:3-11; 4:7-18; 12:1-10; Phil 1:18b-24) and finally conducts a survey on the other relevant texts.

2.2. Historical-cultural background of Paul's theology of suffering

2.2.1. The cultural milieu of Paul's time

2.2.1.1. Jewish view on suffering

The Jews in Paul's days employed a wide range of interpretations concerning suffering, depending on the sufferer's circumstances. As this section will point out, these interpretations included, for instance, the views of suffering as punitive (i.e., divine retribution as a result of sin), formative, probative, vicarious, or expiatory (see

examples below). However, a survey of ancient Jewish literature² reveals that the Jews, more often than not, linked suffering to the first category – namely, to God's punishment and discipline for committed sins (Croy 1998:130-131). This is the predominant understanding of suffering in much of the Old Testament, especially in the Pentateuch and the prophetic books: the former stresses that obedience to God results in blessings, but disobedience in curses (e.g., Lv 26; Dt 27-28). In the latter, sin is followed by a prophetic pronouncement of divine punishment (e.g., Is 10:5-19; Jer 25; Am 2:6-16; Jon 1:1-2; Zep 3:1-8) and ultimately results, in most cases, in the fulfilment of the foretold calamities (e.g., 2 Ki 17:6-23; Jer 39:1-10; 52:24-34). Similarly, the book of Judges displays a repeated cycle of sin, punishment, repentance and deliverance (e.g., Jdg 2:11-23). The Jews' understanding of suffering in Paul's day was certainly shaped to a large degree by this scriptural principle of divine retribution, as is evident from some later Jewish writings in which this theme frequently appears, such as Maccabean literature (e.g. 2 Macc 6:12-16; 7:32-33; 3 Macc 2:13), the Qumran scrolls (e.g., 4QDibHam^a III), as well as the writings of Paul's contemporaries – Philo (e.g., *Curses* 126-162) and Josephus (e.g., *J.W.* 1.656; 6.110). In each of these examples suffering is brought as a divine punishment and discipline for committed sins. While the Old Testament features this principle primarily within a corporate context (AYBD 1992:220), the later Jewish writers applied it more and more to individual persons as well (1992:223).

This punitive view on suffering was not necessarily exclusive of the other descriptive titles of suffering noted above (the formative, probative, vicarious and expiatory views). For instance, punitive suffering frequently included the formative aspect – when God's punishment of sin is recounted in the context of his merciful and loving purpose of not merely punishing the sinner, but of disciplining and educating him towards repentance and a renewed lifestyle (Croy 1998:84, 111). In Hosea, for instance, God's judgement on the Israelites (chap. 13) has also the purpose to persuade them to repent, return to God, trust him and do good (14:1-3). Other Old Testament examples of this punitive-formative view on suffering include Deuteronomy 4:30, Job 5:17-27; 36:8-12 and 15, Isaiah 19:22, Hosea 6:1 and Amos 4:6-11. Post-

² Including the Old Testament, the extra-biblical wisdom literature of Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon, Maccabean literature, the Qumran scrolls, as well as the writings of Philo and Josephus.

exilic Jewish writers increasingly considered and stressed the formative values of retributive suffering (AYBD 1992:223), such as is evident, for instance, in Sirach 2:1-6, the Qumranic *Hodayot*^a (*Thanksgiving Hymns*^a) IX 24-26 and Philo's *On Curses* 163. Since such loving discipline, which is designed to cause refinement and growth (Talbert 1991:12), ultimately is for the good of the sufferer, the experienced hardship needed to be accepted and responded to properly (1991:15).

While on the one hand the Jews in antiquity usually viewed suffering with the assumption that the sufferer has in some way “strayed from the right path” (Talbert 1991:16), suffering was, on the other hand, at times viewed in purely non-punitive terms, such as suffering as a mere instruction and training in virtue (e.g., Dt 8:2-5), suffering as a form of testing (e.g., Dt 8:2), or suffering as a result of “natural causes and accidents” (e.g., 2 Sa 4:4; LBD 2016). While the non-punitive view of suffering can already be found occasionally in the Old Testament, this view became more and more prominent during and after Israel's long and severe exile, during which it became increasingly clear that the principle outlined in Deuteronomy 27-28 seemingly lacked consistent application, since too often, as noted for instance in Psalm 73:1-15 and Ecclesiastes 7:15, the righteous suffered, while the wicked prospered (AYBD 1992:221). Consequently, these non-punitive views on suffering can be found in various post-exilic Jewish writings (e.g., Sir 2:1-6; Wis 3:5-6; 4 Macc 11:12; Philo, *Rewards* 119). Furthermore, the Jews at times even strongly objected to the notion of God sending certain calamities as a retributive punishment – such as famine (e.g., Philo, *Prelim. Studies* 171).

2.2.1.2. Greco-Roman view on suffering

In contrast to the Jewish view described above, the Greco-Roman view on suffering was more frequently non-punitive³ (Croy 1998:156). Suffering was therefore often perceived more positively in that it was viewed as providing an opportunity for noble endurance and thus for a demonstration of one's virtue and strength of character (Fitzgerald 1988:115). In turn, such endurance of suffering was commonly used to inspire and teach others, providing for them an example in how to appropriately deal

³ One example of the punitive perspective on suffering is found in Cicero's writing (*Har. resp.* 39), where he explains that Plancius' suffering is a divinely appointed punishment for his sins.

with their own hardships (Shi 2007:270). For instance, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, who was another contemporary of Paul, wrote that good people are subjected to suffering for the purpose of teaching others to endure, or, in other words, to provide for them an example that they can imitate (*Prov.* 6.3). Fredrickson (2016:5) points out that in Greco-Roman society the notion of suffering producing good character in the sufferer was widely held. This belief is already evident in the writing of the Greek Aeschylus, who held that Zeus had established a law that learning comes through suffering (*Ag.* 177-178). Cicero likewise explained that certain lessons are learned through suffering, rather than study (*Fam.* 1.7), and Epictetus believed that Zeus trains people through difficult circumstances, such as poverty, sickness or exile (*Diatr.* 3.24.113). Seneca wrote that suffering provides the opportunity for growth in virtue (*Prov.* 4.5-7), that wisdom often comes through suffering (*Ep.* 94.74) and that happiness frequently originates in hardship (*Ep.* 110.3).

On the other hand, suffering was at times viewed with contempt and suspicion (Shi 2007:257-258). In such instances suffering was linked not to honour and glory, but to shame and humiliation (2007:269). For instance, while battle scars on a man's chest, throat or face attested to his bravery and were viewed as honourable, battle scars on his back attested to his cowardice and were therefore viewed with contempt (Glancy 2004:106). Servius Galba, for example, openly boasted of his honourable scars, stressing that all of them were located in his front (Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 45.39.16)⁴. Even much more dishonourable than scars on the back were the scars which one obtained from a flogging, since flogging was commonly used as a corporal punishment (Glancy 2004:107). Walters (1997:39) explains that a whipped person was as disgraceful as a person who had fallen victim to rape. Thus, whether suffering was viewed positively or negatively depended largely on the sufferer's specific circumstances.

Each of the predominant philosophical schools in the first-century Greco-Roman world had its own distinct attitudes towards suffering: DeSilva (2004:97) notes that in Platonism unjust suffering was seen as superior to just (or deserved) suffering and

⁴ In contrast, Ajax's lack of any battle scars on his body is viewed in a negative light in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 13:262-267.

those who endured hardships for the good of society were considered to be truly noble and brave. While the Epicureans tried to avoid suffering at all costs (Kilbourn 2017:75), Stoics were to welcome it as a divinely given opportunity for their own good (see Seneca's examples noted above; Shi 2007:240) and for the good of society, since one's endurance of suffering could teach and thus benefit others (Seneca, *Prov.* 6.3). According to Stoic theory the virtuous were not to be afraid of (Seneca, *Prov.* 4.6) or shaken by external matters, such as misfortune or sickness (Shi 2007:240), since, as Epictetus repeatedly emphasised, one has control over his responses to suffering, but not over the hardships themselves (e.g., *Diatr.* 3.3.15; Perkins 1995:82). Stoics were therefore to be unaffected by their suffering and be “above” it. Yet, as Kilbourn (2017:90) remarks, it is doubtful that in reality many Stoics would have adhered to these ideals when facing severe hardship.

2.2.1.3. *Christian suffering at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders*

Just as Jesus himself had already experienced fierce opposition from the Jewish religious leaders (e.g., Mt 12:14, 24; 22:15-18; 26:3-4, 14-15; 27:20-23), so the church, from its very beginning, suffered on their account. The book of Acts notes that the church was actively persecuted (8:1, 3; 26:11) and reveals that the Jewish religious leaders' opposition included threats (4:21; 9:1), false accusations (6:11, 13-14; 21:28; 24:2-9), slander (14:2), stirring up of mob violence (6:12; 13:50; 17:5, 13; 21:27, 30-36), beatings (5:40; 18:17; 21:32), imprisonments⁵ (4:3; 5:18; 8:3; 26:10), plots to kill (9:23-24; 23:12-15) and finally, even execution (7:58-60; 26:10). In regard to Paul, Acts 8:3 and 9:1, as well as Galatians 1:13, attest to the fierceness of his former persecution of the church.

It needs to be noted that the Jewish religious leaders did not persecute Gentile Christians, but only their deviant Jewish brothers and sisters who had accepted Christ's teaching. Furthermore, if these Jewish Christians had separated themselves from the synagogue community, “the synagogue would have had no authority over them” (Fredriksen 2014:40). But because most of them did remain within the synagogue they were still subject to its disciplinary actions (DeSilva 2004:105). Such

⁵ In addition, the Jewish religious leaders' opposition at times led to the imprisonment of Christians by Roman officials (e.g., Ac 21:33).

actions included, for instance, a whipping of thirty-nine lashes, which Paul received on five occasions (2 Cor 11:24). Ultimately, the Jewish Christians were commonly rejected by the Jewish community and expelled from its synagogues (e.g., Jn 9:22; 12:42; Ac 13:50).

A number of reasons contributed to the Jewish religious leaders' often violent opposition against the early church. The following four factors seem to have played a major role: first, the message of a crucified messiah was perceived as deeply offensive, not only because the person who died on a cross was cursed (Dt 21:22-23; Gal 3:13), but also because a crucified messiah did not meet the Jews' expectations. Smith (2012, chap. 15) explains that they were expecting a messiah who would rule as king and deliver his people from under Roman bondage. Second, the Jewish religious leaders perceived the church as a threat to their special role as interpreters and priests of God's law (Cairns 1996:60) and they were jealous of the church's successes (Ac 5:17; 13:45; 17:5). Third, the Jewish religious leaders – just as they had already been offended by Jesus and his disciples (e.g., Mk 2:23-24; 3:1-6; 7:1-5; Lk 11:38), were likewise offended by the Christians' seemingly lax attitude towards the observance of the law. And fourth, they disagreed with the Jewish Christians' close fellowship with Gentiles without requiring them to be circumcised (cf. Gal 5:11; Fredriksen 2014:40).

2.2.1.4. Christian suffering at the hands of the Romans

From the Roman government: The early church was not officially persecuted by the Roman government prior to A.D. 64, since before that time the Romans viewed Christianity as a sect within the legally sanctioned religion of Judaism⁶. During those days the Roman officials therefore often responded with indifference to the Jewish religious leaders' attempts to prosecute Christians (Praet 2014:40). Accordingly, when these leaders brought Paul before the Roman proconsul Gallio, he refused to be involved in their religious quarrel (Ac 18:12-17). Thus, through his indifference

⁶ The fact that the Romans had not yet distinguished between Christianity and Judaism is confirmed by Claudius' exiling of the Jews (rather than the Christians) from Rome in around A.D. 49 because of the disturbances surrounding "Chrestus" (Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4). According to Moreau (2014:32) this term undoubtedly refers to Christ. He notes that only Christian messianism was capable to cause such disturbances among the Jewish community in Rome.

Gallio allowed the early church to legally operate in Corinth (Baker, Martin and Toney 2009:272). Nevertheless, as is evident from the book of Acts, some Christians in the early church prior to A.D. 64 did occasionally suffer certain punishments that were sanctioned by the governing Roman officials, such as beatings with rods (2 Cor 11:25), which was a Roman punishment (Ac 16:19-22), or short imprisonments (e.g., Ac 16:23-24). Yet, such opposition did not derive from the Roman government per se, but primarily from the Jewish religious leaders and occasionally from Greco-Roman society (e.g., Ac 14:5). These took the initiative in dragging certain Christians before the Roman authorities, pressuring them to punish these Christians (e.g., Ac 16:19-24; 17:5-9; 18:12-17; 21:27-36), just as it had already been the case with Pilate, who gave in to the demands of the Jewish religious leaders when he sentenced Jesus to death (Mt 27:1-26).

In A.D. 64 these circumstances changed when a fire destroyed large parts of ten of Rome's fourteen districts. Nero, whom rumours blamed to have deliberately set this fire in order to create space for new building projects (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.40), diverted the attention by blaming the Christians for arson. Nero unleashed a fierce persecution on the Christians in Rome, under which numerous believers lost their lives – often in gruesome ways, such as by being torn by dogs, crucifixion and fire (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2-4). Although this persecution was local and temporal (A.D. 64-65), it had far reaching consequences: while Christians were technically arrested based on the charge of arson, the only required proof of their involvement was their confession of being a Christian (Guy 2004:63). Williams (2012:220) points out that although there is no evidence that any law explicitly declared Christianity illegal, it became widely known across the Roman empire that in fact it was, for even after A.D. 65 the mere profession of being a Christian was deemed a punishable offence *if* one was formally charged before the Roman authorities (2012:179, 221).

From Greco-Roman society: While Christianity was not formally persecuted by the Roman government during most of Paul's days, the church, as it spread outside of Palestine, suffered in various ways from unofficial persecution by Greco-Roman society (cf. 2 Cor 1:6-7; Phil 1:28-30; 1 Pt 4:12-19), which viewed Christianity as a threat to its well-being: Fredriksen (2014:42-43) explains that the ancient

Mediterranean world firmly believed that all gods exist, that these gods are more powerful than humans and that their worship makes them happy, which in turn results in the well-being and happiness of people. Thus, in order for society to thrive it needed the help of the gods to supply sufficient food, good health, prosperity and peace, and it was through sacrifices that their help and favour could be secured (Guy 2004:73). In Cicero's *Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo* 5.5, for instance, the gods are stated to govern the Roman republic by their help and protection. In addition, these gods are entreated for the republic's continuing welfare.

Yet, if the gods were dishonoured, they were perceived as angrily bringing disaster upon humanity. Because Christians refused to sacrifice to idols they were viewed as putting the Greco-Roman society at risk (Guy 2004:74) and they were often blamed for various troubles, such as the overflowing of the Tiber, lack of rain, an earthquake, famine or the plague (Tertullian, *Apol.* 40.2). Because loyalty to the gods was closely linked to one's loyalty to the emperor, authorities, city, family, friends and associates (DeSilva 2004:105), and because the Christians' lifestyle opposed the traditional values of society, they were frequently hated in the Greco-Roman world (Williams 2012:224). This is well illustrated in Tacitus' *Annales* 15.44.2, which states that the Christians, due to their abominations, were a hated group.

Christians, who were regarded as atheists, did not only offend their neighbours by refusing to sacrifice to idols, but also by withdrawing from cultic ceremonies (see 1 Cor 10:14-22; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1), which played an essential role in most political, economic and social activities (DeSilva 2004:105), since no distinction was drawn between religion and secular life (2004:558). Christians were therefore perceived as strange and anti-social (Hartog 2010:51), and they earned a reputation of despising society (Tacitus' *Annales* 15.44.3 attests to the fact that Christians were viewed as hating mankind). In turn, as noted in the previous paragraph, they themselves became hated by society. Having been regarded as enemies of the human race (Tertullian, *Apol.* 37), who were called a depraved and outrageous superstition (Pliny the Younger, *Ep. Tra.* 10.97) and thought to be capable of various abominations (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2), they naturally became subject to suspicion, rumours, reproach and slander (DeSilva 2004:105). Because of these accusations and

suspensions, and because they withdrew from various aspects of civic life, Christians also suffered economic and political disadvantages (2004:106).

2.2.1.5. *The use of suffering as a rhetorical device in Greco-Roman letter writing*

Suffering could be effectively used for rhetorical purposes in Greco-Roman letter writing. The following uses of suffering as a rhetorical device, some of which occasionally also feature in Paul's letters, played a significant role in Greco-Roman letter writing: first, Sumney (2006:666) points out that letter writers were aware that, in order to successfully persuade their readers, it was essential that they demonstrated their concern for and good will towards them. One way an author could accomplish this was by communicating to his readers that he was suffering for their good. For instance, Cicero, in his letter to Atticus (*Att.* 7.14), declares that he writes despite the fact that he is suffering from an eye inflammation. Although he would have better rested his eyes, Cicero instead endured more pain by writing this letter and thus evidenced a willingness to suffer for Atticus' sake. Similarly, Cicero elsewhere remarks that he suffered on behalf of his country in general and specifically in order to defend his readers (*Har. resp.* 45). Sumney (2006:666) holds that Paul's readiness in Colossians to suffer on behalf of his readers (1:24; 2:1), as well as the repeated references to his suffering throughout the letter (1:24; 4:3, 11, 18), are designed to persuade his readers to trust him and comply with his instructions. While this appears to be true, Paul's suffering on behalf of his readers in Colossians 1:24 and 2:1 is not merely featured for rhetorical purposes, but also constitutes an important part of his theology of suffering (see section 2.4.4.).

Second, one's wilful suffering for another was commonly understood in Greco-Roman society to be a demonstration of friendship, since friends were supposed to share all things (Seneca, *Ep.* 6.2). For instance, Aristotle's definition of friendship includes the sharing of joys and sorrows (*Eth. nic.* 9.4.1), and Cicero claims that one's burden of adversity is lessened by his friends' sharing in it (*Amic.* 22). In addition, Plutarch notes that a refusal to share one's friends' anxieties and burdens is unacceptable (*Amic. mult.* 96A), and explains that it is actually impossible for a true friend not to share in these (*Amic. mult.* 96B). Some authors therefore described their willingness to suffer for their readers in order to demonstrate their friendship and

consequently to indirectly persuade them to accept the letter's message and follow its instructions. Cicero, for example, writes to Tiro about their sharing in sorrow and joy in order to highlight their partnership and friendship (*Fam.* 16.21). Fredrickson (2016:13-14) rightly notes that Paul also seems to have had this purpose in mind when he wrote 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, for in this passage Paul repeatedly refers to his sharing of comfort and suffering with the readers, thus proving to them their friendship.

Third, Fredrickson (2016:5) points out that since a person's ability to endure suffering was highly esteemed in Greco-Roman society, suffering was at times used in letter writing to demonstrate a person's virtue and strength of character. Suffering and tragedies are, for instance, linked to heroism in Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* (153). It must be noted that it is then not the person's suffering itself that displays his virtue, but rather the positive manner in which he deals with it. This rhetorical device also features in Quintilian's writing (*Inst.* 12.2.29-30), where the contempt of pain (in that one remains strong and sound despite his suffering) of certain individuals is demonstrated and highly regarded.

Fitzgerald (1988:44) argues that one of the major reasons why Paul included the numerous references to his suffering in 2 Corinthians was to demonstrate his virtue. This notion might seem plausible in light of the fact that Paul, whose person, authority and gospel were undermined by false apostles, presented a defence of his apostleship when writing 2 Corinthians (Utley 2012), thus trying to present himself in a good light. Yet, Fitzgerald's interpretation seems unlikely when one considers that Paul aimed to confer honour and glory not to himself but to God – by showing, in a paradoxical manner, that God is most powerfully at work in him when he is at his weakest and most vulnerable (e.g., 2 Cor 12:9-10). Shi (2007:279) agrees with such a conclusion, noting that only through Paul's true weakness could the divine power be manifested.

Fourth, mention of the author's own suffering in Greco-Roman letter writing frequently served as an example for the readers to follow. In other words, the author's faithful endurance of the stated suffering constituted an inspiring example for the reader in how to appropriately deal with his own hardships (Shi 2007:270). As noted earlier,

this notion is expressed in Seneca's *On Providence* 6.3, where he explains that the suffering of good people serves the purpose of teaching others to endure. That the reader ought to imitate the author's example is usually not explicitly stated but merely implied: in Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* 12.2.29-30 the contempt of pain of certain persons is noted, among other good qualities, in order to provide impressive examples of moral performance, which the reader, by implication, should follow. Likewise, in *De haruspicum responso* 45 Cicero's own suffering on behalf of his country implicitly serves as an example to be imitated by his readers, who are stated to experience the same difficult circumstances. In providing an account in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16 of his previous suffering and how he has faithfully dealt with it, Paul seemingly has, at least partially, this very purpose in mind, for the Thessalonians are stated to suffer as well (v. 14).

2.2.2. General background and historical context of 2 Corinthians and Philippians

2.2.2.1. Second Corinthians

The beginning of 2 Corinthians indicates that Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth – a church which he himself had founded during his second missionary journey (Ac 18:1-18), as well as to the larger body of believers in the region of Achaia (2 Cor 1:1b). He probably wrote it from Macedonia in autumn of A.D. 56 (Verbrugge and Harris 2017). His writing was prompted, on the one hand, by the good report Paul received from Titus in Macedonia regarding the Corinthian church⁷ (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:6-7) and, on the other hand, by the fresh, troubling news that some false

⁷ During his three years of ministry in Ephesus Paul learned from Timothy (1 Cor 16:10-11) that his letter (1 Corinthians) did not fully resolve the worrisome situation in the Corinthian church and that certain persons continued to walk in their sinful ways (2 Cor 12:21). Hence, Paul made a trip to Corinth, which turned out to be a deeply painful visit (2 Cor 2:1-2). Back in Ephesus he wrote them the 'severe letter' (2 Cor 2:3-4), after which he worried that he might have addressed them too harshly (2 Cor 7:8) and he was anxiously awaiting the report from Titus regarding how the Corinthians had responded to his letter (Kruse 2015:33-34). Although Paul, who went to Troas for the very purpose of preaching there, was given a divine opportunity to evangelise, he left Troas in order to meet with Titus as soon as possible (2 Cor 2:12-13). After having finally met Titus in Macedonia and having received the comforting news of the Corinthians' repentance (2 Cor 7:6-7) of their previous hostility towards him, Paul, in his relief, replied to them with 2 Corinthians (Lea and Black 2003).

apostles intruded the church from without⁸ (3:1; 10:13-16; Black 2012:55), attacking and undermining not only Paul's apostolic authority (2 Cor 12:12), but also his person (10:1, 10; 11:6), motives (12:16-19), delivery style (10:10; 11:6) and gospel message (4:3). Consequently, Paul had two main purposes in writing 2 Corinthians. First, Paul aimed to express his deep relief, comfort and joy that he felt when he heard of the Corinthians' repentant response to his 'severe letter' (1:3-4; 7:4-16), and to express his love for them (2:4; 7:3; 11:11). In doing so Paul intended to pave the way for a successful third visit (12:14; 13:1). And second, in light of the various accusations of the false apostles (e.g., 10:10; 11:5-6, 12-15; 12:16), Paul aspired to present an extended defence of his apostleship (chaps 10-13), discredit the false apostles and combat their influence in the Corinthian church (Utley 2012).

It needs to be noted that the Corinthian population at Paul's time was highly competitive – not only in regard to business, but also politics and social status (DeSilva 2004:556). The Corinthians constantly sought honour and public recognition, and frequently promoted themselves through public speaking and boasting. The speaker's rhetorical skills and delivery style were just as important as the content of his speech (2004:557). Other factors that could increase a person's status were, for example, one's occupation, income, wealth, knowledge and position in the family⁹. Leaders in the Corinthian environment required wealth in order to sponsor various civic needs and consequently increase their personal popularity and power. Leadership in Corinth thus naturally consisted of the elite who could afford it (Guthrie 2015). In light of these cultural and social norms it is not surprising that Paul's leadership was questioned in Corinth.

2.2.2.2. *Philippians*

Philippians 1:1b indicates that Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi, which he had founded during his second missionary journey (Ac 16:12-40). He wrote this letter

⁸ Because Paul's mood changes drastically in chapters 10-13 it is possible that only after he had already written the first part of the letter (chaps 1-9) Paul received the troubling news about the false apostles and consequently penned down these last chapters as a response to that problem.

⁹ Because the lives of the relatively new believers in Corinth had been shaped by these cultural and social values (Guthrie 2015), it is no surprise that this competitive and achievement-oriented spirit found its way into the church (Baker et al. 2009:272).

from prison (Phil 1:7, 12-14, 17) – probably from Rome, sometime between A.D. 60 and 62 (Fee 1995:35-36). The Christians in Philippi held a special place in Paul's heart. They were his dear friends, whom he considered his partners and from whom he accepted financial support (2 Cor 8:1-3; 11: 8-9; Phil 1:5; 4:15-16, 18). The letter was occasioned by the visit of Epaphroditus, who delivered the Philippians' gift for Paul (Phil 4:14, 18) and who probably shared with him some of his and the Philippians' concerns regarding the circumstances in their church (particularly asking him for advice in how to deal with the church's opponents; 1:28; 3:2, 18-19). Thus, Paul's main purposes for writing this letter were to express his deep gratitude to the Philippians for the gift he had received from them (4:14, 18), as well as to respond to their questions and concerns. In doing so he called the church to be united (1:27; 2:2-4; 4:2) and humble (2:3-11), not to fear their opponents, and to endure the suffering that resulted from their opposition (1:28-29). Yet another purpose of Paul's writing was to give his readers an update on his circumstances in prison (1:12-26) and, if he was to be released, of his future plans (2:23-24; Herrick 2004).

Philippians 1:28-30 reveals that the church in Philippi underwent some kind of suffering that was caused by their opponents. Because of the non-existing or minimal Jewish population in Philippi (Cousar 2009:6) and in light of the historical context (see second half of section 2.1.1.4.) it is plausible that the opposition derived from Greco-Roman society, which considered the Christians' refusal to partake in idolatry to be offensive and a threat to the unity and common good of the Philippians (DeSilva 2004:655). Their displeasure and suspicion would have readily resulted in slander and other forms of hostility against these Christians (2004:105). Gregory and Tuckett (2005:363-364) reasonably suggest that while the Philippian Christians likely experienced various disruptions in their relationships with their families, friends, business partners and customers, and possibly underwent occasional beatings and brief imprisonments, the long-term effect of their suffering would have primarily been of an economical nature.

2.3. Exegetical study of four key Pauline passages on suffering

2.3.1. Second Corinthians 1:3-11¹⁰

2.3.1.1. Literary context

The passage under examination functions as the introduction of the letter – it is merely preceded by the prescript (1:1-2), which briefly names the author and recipients, and expresses good wishes. The passage is immediately followed by (1) Paul's justification of his changed travel plans and of his sending of the previous 'severe letter' (1:12-2:4), (2) his admonition of the Corinthians to forgive the one who has caused him much pain (2:5-11) and (3) his mention of his unrest in Troas due to the absence of Titus and consequently due to the lack of news from the Corinthians (2:12-13). In the remainder of the letter Paul explains his apostolic ministry with the Corinthians (2:14-7:16) in a predominantly apologetic manner (Verbrugge and Harris 2017), exhorts the Corinthians to give generously towards the collection for the Jerusalem church (chaps 8-9) and defends his apostleship (chaps 10-13). By writing the introductory passage of 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 Paul reassures the Corinthians of their friendship (vv. 6-7) since, as Fredrickson's (2016:13-14) study reveals, the concept of sharing with another was closely linked to friendship in Greco-Roman society and partnership (vv. 7, 11). Paul thus secures their good-will with the hope that they would warmly receive the remainder of his message. This is especially important because much of what follows in the letter is connected to some painful past experiences and disappointments, which Paul and the Corinthians shared (cf. 1:15-2:1, 4-5; 7:8-9). Witherington (1995) adds that the securing of the Corinthians' good-will is also important so that they would fully reconcile with him and break their ties with the false apostles. Finally, Paul introduces the theme of suffering in this introductory passage (1:4-9), which plays a significant role throughout the rest of the letter.

2.3.1.2. Verse-by-verse analysis

Verse 3: God the Father is described with four titles – 'God', 'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', 'Father of mercies' and 'God of all comfort'. The last two titles reveal important

¹⁰ The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 1 in the appendix.

attributes of him: first, he is described figuratively as the 'Father of mercies'. BDAG (2000) defines the term 'οἰκτιρμός' (mercy) as a “display of concern over another's misfortune” or a display of compassion. While Paul used the term 'οἰκτιρμός' in Romans 9:15 and 12:1 in the context of God showing mercy to sinful people by saving them, this term is applied to believers in Philippians 2:1 and Colossians 3:12 in the context of displaying mercy (or compassion) to others without reference to sin. The Father's mercy in verse 3 could theoretically include either of the two connotations (i.e., his mercy which saves the sinner from eternal punishment, or his mercy which shows compassion and aid to those who experience any form of misfortune), or, since they are closely linked, both of them at the same time. Nevertheless, verses 3b-4 make clear that it is the second connotation which is emphasised in verse 3. Thus, God is presented as the one who shows great compassion to those in misfortune and distress. More than that, as the '*Father of mercies*' and 'God of all comfort' he is the ultimate source of compassion. For these reasons and also because he has recently experienced God's compassion first-hand by receiving great comfort (vv. 4-7) and deliverance from him (v. 10), Paul starts this section with a proclamation of praise (“Blessed be the God...”).

Verse 4: The beginning of this verse (“who comforts us in all our affliction”), as well as its end (“we ourselves are comforted by God”), reinforces the truth from the previous verse that God is a God of comfort. At the same time these two phrases establish that Paul and Timothy experience God's comfort in their own hardships, such as was the case in their former anxiety in Troas and Macedonia (2:12-13; 7:5-7, 12-13), as well as in their severe affliction in Asia (1:8-9a). Paul notes that God *constantly* comforts them. The substantival participle 'παρακαλῶν' is built on the present tense stem and thus points, although not emphatically, to the continuity of God's comfort for Paul and Timothy (Mounce 2009:271) in order to enable them to *continually* comfort others who are afflicted – the infinitive 'δύνασθαι' is in the present tense and thus refers to a continuous action (2009:299). Guthrie's (2015) remark that Paul was only able to comfort others in their suffering because he himself had experienced affliction and God-given comfort is true, for it is through one's own suffering that one learns to truly empathise with those who are afflicted. So, Paul emphasises the fact that their comfort is for the benefit of others, although this is not the only reason why God

comforted them (since the divine comfort was also for their own sakes; 7:13). The following clause (v. 4c) then reveals how Paul and Timothy can comfort others – with the very comfort that they received from God.

Verse 4 revolves around the concept of 'comfort' – as does the entire paragraph (vv. 3-7). While the noun 'comfort' (παράκλησις) is repeated six times in the paragraph, the verb 'comfort(s/ed)' (παρακαλέω) appears four times. The terms 'παράκλησις' and 'παρακαλέω' can refer to the ideas of (1) an emboldening, encouragement and exhortation, (2) a strong request and (3) the lifting of another's spirit through comfort, consolation and encouragement (BDAG 2000). The literary and historical context clarifies that the third option is in view in verses 3-7. Guthrie (2015), Martin (2014:143) and Seifrid (2014:25) shed light on what this definition further entails: Martin rightly cautions against understanding the term 'comfort' in this paragraph as a mere consolation, since, as the other two scholars emphasise, this divine comfort includes strengthening encouragement with a hope for the future, as well as active help and deliverance from distress. Thus, God's comfort includes powerful action and an instilling of hope.

In addition, the literary context reveals that the connotation of joy underlies Paul's concept of 'comfort' throughout this paragraph: in 2 Corinthians 7:4-16, which parallels and elaborates 1:3-7, the terms 'παράκλησις' and 'παρακαλέω' are three times closely linked to joy (vv. 4, 6-7, 13). Paul states that he has formerly experienced deep unrest due to Titus' absence and the lack of news regarding the Corinthians (2:12-13; 7:5), but when he finally met Titus and heard the good news of the Corinthians' positive response to Paul's severe letter, he was deeply relieved and overjoyed (1:3-4; 7:6-16).

Verse 5: Paul draws up a comparison between his (and Timothy's) suffering and comfort: the verse literally reads, 'For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so through Christ also our comfort abounds.' Although the first-century Greco-Roman society at times viewed suffering with contempt and suspicion (Shi 2007:258), as it would have certainly been the case with their beatings and imprisonments (Glancy 2004:107), Paul makes no secret of their abundant sufferings. Later in this letter he even illustrates the various ways in which he/they suffered (6:4-10; 11:23-33). By

highlighting their suffering, which was viewed negatively by society, Paul goes against the grain of the honour/shame contest and communicates to his readers that his suffering must not be associated with shame and must be understood in positive terms (since it adds comfort).

Paul considers their afflictions, which they experience because of the gospel (i.e., on account of Jesus – διὰ Ἰησοῦν; 2 Cor 4:11), to be a sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. Because salvation comes through grace and is thus entirely the work of God (Eph 2:8), I agree with Guthrie (2015) and Harris (2005:148), who clarify that this sharing in Jesus' sufferings does not refer to the sufferings Jesus himself endured, but to the sufferings which the church endures in association with him, that is, because of him and in union with him. While Paul and Timothy suffer abundantly, at the same time they also abound in joyous comfort (cf. 7:4, 6-7, 13), which is specified in this verse to have come through Jesus. Seifrid (2014:19) describes well the Father's and the Son's roles in the outpouring of divine comfort, noting that while the Father is the source of all comfort and mercy (v. 3), Jesus is the mediator through whom these come.

Verse 6: Although the two conditional statements (“If we are afflicted” and “if we are comforted”) point to a possibility, it is clear from verses 4-5, as well as from the rest of the letter, that Paul and Timothy are both- greatly afflicted and greatly comforted. Paul already wrote of their comfort serving the benefit of others (v. 4) and this theme is further developed here (v. 6): their affliction and comfort bring great benefit to the Corinthians, as those serve the purpose of bringing comfort and salvation to them. While the term 'σωτηρία' (salvation) is sometimes used in the New Testament to refer to physical deliverance or preservation, it more often refers to the believers' salvation in heaven (BDAG 2000). In verse 6 the latter usage of 'σωτηρία' is in view because (1) Paul does not desire so much for the Corinthians to be free from any affliction, but for them to patiently endure it (v. 6e), as well as to be saved eternally (7:8-11); (2) Paul noted in verses 4-5 that there is in fact much gain in affliction; and (3) nothing from the historical context suggests that the Corinthians in general were subject to grave physical dangers from which they needed to be delivered. Thus, because in addition to joyous comfort eternal salvation is in view here in verse 6, the Corinthians'

benefit, which they obtain from Paul's affliction and comfort, is indeed great. Guthrie (2015) satisfactorily explains how Paul's affliction can be for the Corinthians' salvation: they gain salvation through his ministry, and since this ministry involves suffering, it is when Paul endures this suffering that the Corinthians gain eternal profit.

In addition, because Paul and Timothy have experienced affliction and comfort, they are in turn able to provide comfort to the Corinthians when they too undergo the same sufferings (v. 6e). Harris (2005:148) emphasises that although their sufferings are the same in that each results from their commitment to Jesus and each is endured in union with him, they are, however, not identical. This notion finds considerable support in light of (1) Paul's undergoing of severe hardships on a regular basis due to his (unique) apostolic ministry (2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-33) and (2) the historical background concerning the Corinthians' suffering, namely, that their suffering was probably caused predominantly by Greco-Roman society and would have primarily included being "only" subject to suspicion, rumours, accusations, reproach and slander, which would have also brought them economic and political disadvantages (DeSilva 2004:105-106). The fact that the comfort is given to the Corinthians while they patiently endure these sufferings (v. 6e) indirectly serves as an exhortation for them to continue to walk in such patient endurance.

Verse 7: The hope (or expectation) of Paul and Timothy in regard to the Corinthians is firm (βέβαιος), because as the Corinthians share with them in sufferings, so they also share in comfort (which they experience in patient endurance; v. 6e). Thus, Paul has confidence that the Corinthians will be able to remain steadfast in their suffering, just as they have been steadfast in the past (BDAG 2000). Yet, the generally rather unstable disposition of the Corinthians lets Seifrid (2014:29) come to the reasonable conclusion that Paul's unshaken hope derives more from his confidence in God than from his confidence in the Corinthians, that is, Paul's unshaken hope is primarily based on his faith and confidence in God's comforting work among the Corinthians.

The last part of verse 6 has already noted that the Corinthians experienced the same sufferings as Paul and Timothy did. Verse 7b not only repeats this idea but further adds an emphasis of partnership, since the phrase literally reads 'as you are partners

of the sufferings'. This emphasis on partnership is further carried into verse 7c, although no explicit reference is made to it (no verb is stated). Such partnership is merely implied: 'so also (you are partners) of comfort'. Technically, the text does not refer to '*our* sufferings' and '*our* comfort', as the ESV translates it, but '*the* sufferings' and '*the* comfort'. Kruse (2015:91) and Seifrid (2014:29) both stress that since Paul does not include a possessive pronoun in front of these two nouns, the text's meaning is that while the Corinthians share with Paul and Timothy in suffering and comfort, they share not in *their* sufferings and comfort, but in *Christ's* sufferings and in *God's* comfort. This interpretation fits the context well in that it allows for the extension of the principle stated in verse 5, which was applied to Paul and Timothy, to the Corinthians. Just as Paul and Timothy do (v. 5), so the Corinthians share in Christ's sufferings as well as in great comfort (v. 7), which comes from God (v. 3).

In verses 4-7 Paul has employed several rhetorical strategies in order to reassure the Corinthians of their friendship and partnership. In verse 4 he stated that his afflictions benefit others who are afflicted (including the Corinthians, who were also suffering to some extent) and in verse 6 he explained that his afflictions and comfort serve the purpose of bringing comfort and salvation to the Corinthians. In addition, in verses 6e-7 Paul noted that the Corinthians share with him in suffering as well as in comfort (with an emphasis on partnership in verse 7). As noted earlier in section 2.1.1.5., Paul's and the Corinthians' sharing of suffering and comfort proves their friendship according to the Greco-Roman perspective.

Verses 8-9a: Paul wants the Corinthians to be aware of and to “consider carefully” (Guthrie 2015) the affliction he and Timothy previously experienced in Asia, the Roman province in which Paul ministered at least three years (Ac 20:31). The severity of this affliction is emphasised in verses 8b-9a: It burdened them down beyond their strength to endure it (v. 8b), so that as a result they experienced great despair (v. 8c). In addition, they thought that they were surely about to die (v. 9a), and in verse 10a this affliction is described as “so great a peril of death” (τηλικούτου θανάτου; BDAG 2000). For Paul the situation seemed hopeless and impossible to overcome. In light of the life-threatening danger derived from this affliction Fredrickson's (2016:13) suggestion that the affliction merely refers to Paul's regret

after he had sent the 'severe letter' (cf. 2 Cor 7:8) seems highly unlikely. While it is probable that the affliction was caused by the Jewish religious leaders, who strongly opposed Paul throughout his ministry, or by Greco-Roman society, one cannot be certain as to the exact nature of this affliction, since Paul leaves out further details.

Verse 9b: The second half of verse 9 reveals the purpose of Paul's and Timothy's severe affliction in Asia: that (ἵνα) they would not rely on themselves but on God. In verses 8-9 a stark contrast is drawn between the omnipotence of God (who is able to raise the dead) and the limited strength and power of Paul and Timothy ("we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength"; v. 8b). Because the subjunctive points to a possibility (Mounce 2009:288), Paul's use of ὤμεν in verse 9b indicates that he and Timothy had the option to either rely on their own limited strength and power, or on God's perfect strength and power. They were therefore so severely afflicted in Asia for the purpose that they would naturally choose not the first but the second option. Through this affliction God was lovingly guiding Paul and Timothy to have an appropriate attitude – one not of prideful self-reliance but of humble reliance upon God. Hence, the ESV translates verse 9b as "that was *to make us* rely not on ourselves..." (italics mine). God was at work through this affliction, using it for the good of Paul and Timothy.

Verse 10: The verb ῥύομαι (deliver) occurs three times in this verse. It refers to a rescue from danger and implies that this danger is severe (L&N 1996), as is certainly the case with the affliction which Paul and Timothy experienced in Asia (vv. 8-9a). The power of God, which the previous verse highlighted, is now illustrated in verse 10a: God delivered Paul and Timothy from this severe affliction. In verse 10c the verb ἠλπικαμεν (we have hoped) could also be translated in this context as 'we have put our confidence' (BDAG 2000). This verb is an intensive perfect, describing a completed action in the past with the focus on the *result* (or consequences) of the action in the present (Wallace 1996:575-576). Thus, while Paul and Timothy have at one point in the past made the decision to set their hope on God, the emphasis here lays on the resultant confidence they have in the present, which in turn helps them to endure their present struggles. Consequently, Paul can proclaim with confidence that God will continue to deliver them in the future from whatever dangers that will emerge

(v. 10b and 10d).

Verse 11: The theme of partnership, which earlier occurred in verse 7, is also featured in this verse: Paul and Timothy express their desire for the Corinthians to support them by prayer. Matera (2003:44) notes that by doing this Paul cleverly gives the Corinthians, some of whom were criticising him, another opportunity to unite and partner with him. While this might have been true to some degree, it seems that Paul's primary concern was to humbly secure the prayer support of his friends in Corinth. Just as Paul's and Timothy's affliction and comfort were previously stated to be for the benefit of others (vv. 4, 6), likewise the stated purpose for the Corinthians' prayer support is not the benefit of Paul and Timothy, but the benefit of other believers (including the Corinthians) – so that they will give thanks (v. 11b) for the blessing which Paul and Timothy will have received as an answer to the Corinthians' prayers (v. 11c), and be encouraged. Finally, the verse reveals that Paul is confident that through the Corinthians' prayers help will arrive in the midst of their troubles and a blessing will be granted to them (v. 11c). Paul's present hope and confidence in God, which was highlighted in the previous verse, also underlies this last clause of verse 11.

2.3.1.3. Conclusion

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 Paul paints a picture of who God is and of what he does (in the context of the believer's suffering on account of the gospel): God is merciful and compassionate. In fact, as the “Father of mercies” and “God of all comfort” (v. 3), he is the ultimate source of *all* mercy, compassion and comfort. This truth is illustrated in the lives of Paul, Timothy (vv. 4-5a) and the Corinthians (vv. 6-7), who constantly receive God's abundant comfort in their afflictions. While the first paragraph (vv. 3-7) of this passage revolves around God's comfort (and mercy), the second paragraph (vv. 8-11) revolves around his omnipotence and deliverance. As demonstrated in the lives of Paul and Timothy (v. 10a), God is able to deliver believers from deadly perils – even from those that seem impossible to overcome. In addition, God is presented as the one who hears and answers prayers (v. 11).

The passage reveals that God allowed Paul and Timothy to undergo various afflictions for different purposes. First, so that they can experience his abundant

comfort and in turn are able to comfort others who are suffering (vv. 4, 6). Second, so that the Corinthians can receive eternal benefit (i.e., salvation through Paul's and Timothy's ministry, which is characterised by constant hardships; v. 6a-b). And third, so that they would not rely on their own limited strength, but on God's perfect strength and power (v. 9b). It becomes clear, then, that through these various afflictions God was working for the good of Paul and Timothy. For these reasons (i.e., because of who God is, because of how he deals with suffering believers and because of his good and loving purposes for the permitted hardships) Paul praises God (v. 3).

In this passage Paul also demonstrates what (based on God's attributes, actions and loving purposes discussed above) an appropriate response to God and to one's suffering on account of the gospel looks like. Such a response, which is patterned after Paul's example, includes the faithful endurance of one's hardships (this is implied by the entire passage), the praising of God for who he is (v. 3) and a humble reliance on him (v. 9b) – with one's hope, confidence and trust being placed on him (v. 10). Thus, in this passage Paul provides the Corinthians, who likewise suffer because of the gospel, with a model they can follow in the midst of their own hardships.

2.3.2. Second Corinthians 4:7-18¹¹

2.3.2.1. Literary context

In chapter 3 Paul discusses how God has given him and Timothy the privilege to be ministers of the new covenant – a covenant of the Spirit (v. 6), which is by far more glorious than the old covenant (vv. 7-11). In addition, they were given the knowledge of God's glory (4:6). Yet, in praxis Paul's ministry looked anything but glorious, for it was characterised by constant hardships and difficulties. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 Paul explains this apparent discrepancy (Thrall 2004:321), noting that the divine glory comes through his suffering and weaknesses (vv. 7-12), so that the glory is shown to be God's (v. 7).

In 2 Corinthians 4:2-5 Paul explains that he and Timothy (as opposed to the false

¹¹ The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 2 in the appendix.

apostles, whose ministry is corrupt; 2:17; 11:12-13) minister in a pure manner, preach the gospel plainly (v. 2) and proclaim not themselves but Christ (v. 5). In the following verses 7-18 Paul reveals what such an authentic ministry looks like: although much affliction is involved (vv. 7-12), this affliction is endured for the sake of others (v. 15) and put into eternal perspective (v. 17), so that there is great hope for the future (vv. 13-18). This hope is further featured in 5:1-8, where Paul contrasts their burdensome earthly dwelling with their perfect and eternal heavenly dwelling, and expresses their desire to be with God (v. 8) and to please him (v. 9). Throughout 2 Corinthians (and especially in chapters 10-13) Paul defends his apostolic ministry. The passage under examination makes an important contribution to this theme in that it not only reveals that an apostle's suffering is justifiable, but that it is indeed necessary (4:7, 10-12).

2.3.2.2. Verse-by-verse analysis

Verse 7: The conjunction 'δέ' (but, and) links verses 6 and 7 in that verse 7a explains the surrounding circumstances of the precious gift that God gave to Paul and Timothy – the knowledge of God's glory (v. 6) through the gospel (vv. 4-5): they have this treasure in jars of clay. While on the one hand this metaphor highlights the costliness of God's gift, on the other hand it emphasises the fragility of Paul's and Timothy's lives, which are depicted as clay jars. Guthrie (2015:253) explains that in antiquity clay jars were fragile as well as dispensable, and rightly notes that the literary context (vv. 8-12) reveals that the metaphor revolves around the concept of fragility rather than dispensability (2015:254). Paul and Timothy received God's gift in an utterly fragile state: they were afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted and struck down (vv. 8-9). Yet, God allowed this for a purpose – to show that the surpassing greatness (ὑπερβολή) of power (or might, strength; BDAG 2000), which, as Thrall (2004:342) points out, operates in their apostolic ministry, derives not from Paul and Timothy themselves, but from him. Here a genitive of source is employed (Wallace 1996:110), which points to God as the origin of this surpassing power. Therefore, while it does not make sense for a person to store a treasure in a clay jar, God chose to place his “treasure” within the fragile bodies of Paul and Timothy, so that through this paradox the surpassing power is clearly shown to be his.

Verses 8-9: In these two verses Paul illustrates his and Timothy's fragility, revealing

that they are afflicted (or troubled, oppressed; BDAG 2000) in every way (v. 8a), perplexed (v. 8c), persecuted (v. 9a) and struck down (v. 9c). All eight participles in these two verses are present participles and thus describe an ongoing experience of hardship (Mounce 2009:245). Each of the four illustrations of fragility is paired with a contrasting negative statement that follows. These show God's protection in their troubles: they are not crushed (v. 8b), not driven to despair (v. 8d), not forsaken (v. 9b) and not destroyed (v. 9d), such as was the case with their severe affliction in Asia, from which God has rescued them (2 Cor 1:8-10).

The second pair of clauses reveals that their affliction was not only physically taxing, but also mentally and emotionally taxing (v. 8c-d). Yet, just as God did not allow them to be harmed physically to the point of destruction (vv. 8b, 9d), so God did not allow them to be harmed mentally and emotionally to the point of despair (v. 8d). In the midst of their afflictions God faithfully watched over them and preserved them. Witherington (1995) puts it well, stating that although their "clay jars" were full of cracks, they were nevertheless still intact, due to God's miraculous deliverances. Consequently, Paul's and Timothy's fragility is not the only element from verse 7 that is illustrated in verses 8-9, since God's power (v. 7b) is illustrated as well.

Verses 10-11: Although they vary in some details, these two verses essentially say the same thing. The repetition of the basic idea of verse 10 in verse 11 serves the purpose of emphasis and thus reveals the importance of this idea in Paul's argument in the passage under examination. While the first part of each verse further illustrates Paul's and Timothy's fragility in the head proposition (v. 7a), the second part reveals the purpose of their fragility. Thus, what Paul emphasises with these two verses is another purpose of their constant afflictions and fragility: that (ἵνα) Jesus' life may also be manifested in their bodies. This purpose is linked to the first purpose stated earlier in verse 7b-c, since there is a connection between God's power and Jesus' being alive (resurrected).

The continuity of their affliction is stressed by the first word of each verse – 'πάντοτε' and 'ἄει', both of which mean 'always', as well as by the present participle 'περιφέροντες', which on its own could be translated as 'continuously carrying around' (Mounce 2009:245). What they are always carrying around in their bodies is the

'death of Jesus' (v. 10a). In light of this emphasis on continuity, Kruse's (2015:148) translation of the phrase 'τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ' as 'the dying of Jesus' seems to be preferable, since 'dying' (as opposed to 'death') refers to a process. Harris (2005:346) comes to the same conclusion and clarifies that this process of dying includes the various hardships which Jesus experienced leading up to his death.

Just as the 'sufferings of Christ' in 2 Corinthians 1:5 do not refer to the actual sufferings of Jesus, but to the sufferings that are endured in association with him (see discussion on that verse), likewise the 'carrying around of the dying of Jesus' does not refer to Jesus' actual dying, but to the "dying" that Paul and Timothy continuously experience in association with him, that is, the various afflictions and "constant danger of death" they undergo because of their commitment to him (vv. 8-9; BDAG 2000). This interpretation is supported by the parallel phrase (v. 11a), which literally reads, '...are handed over to death *on account of Jesus*' (italics mine).

While verse 10a states, "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus" (NASB), verse 11a does not merely repeat this idea but also features a progression, as it states that Paul and Timothy "...are always being given over to death...". The passive verb 'παραδιδόμεθα' reveals that they are actively handed over to their afflictions and danger of death. The beneficial purpose of this handing over (vv. 10b, 11b) seems to imply that it is God who does this. In any case, it is God who allows them to be handed over to their afflictions. The purpose of this handing over is "that the life of Christ may also be manifested" in Paul's and Timothy's bodies/lives (v. 11b). Since 'life' refers here to "life in the physical sense" (BDAG 2000), the purpose of their afflictions is to manifest that, even after he has died, Jesus is alive (vv. 10b, 11b). Harris (2005:349) appears to be correct when he explains that it is in their endurance and victories through Jesus in the midst of their afflictions that the truth of Jesus being alive is manifested to others. The two parallel phrases (vv. 10b, 11b) use almost exactly the same words, but while verse 10b uses 'τῷ σώματι' (in the body), verse 11b uses 'τῇ θνητῇ σαρκί' (in the mortal flesh). This is significant, for the latter phrase puts emphasis on Paul's and Timothy's fragility and thus highlights once more the paradox of divine power in human weakness. Just as verse 7 has made clear that the divine origin of God's power is revealed in Paul's and Timothy's weakness and

fragility, so verses 10b and 11b display that Jesus' life is likewise revealed in their weakness and fragility.

Verse 12: This verse, which begins with the term 'ὥστε', presents the result of the previous five verses, in which Paul's and Timothy's afflictions and fragility have been noted and illustrated, and the two (related) purposes of their afflictions and fragility have been revealed. Paul writes that as a result “death” is at work in them and, in contrast (δε), life is at work in the Corinthians. The previous verses clarify that their “death” refers to the various afflictions which they constantly experience. The term 'life' refers either to physical life or transcendent life – eternal salvation (BDAG 2000). Only the latter meaning makes sense in the context of verses 10-12: while Paul and Timothy constantly experience hardships 'on account of Jesus' (or, in other words, because of their gospel ministry; v. 11a), the Corinthians hear the gospel and receive spiritual nurture (thus gaining eternal life) through their ministry and afflictions¹². Baker et al. (2009:310) embrace the same conclusion, stating that Paul's and Timothy's ministry (and suffering) has resulted in the Corinthian believers' salvation.

Verse 13: The short quotation comes from the Septuagint reading of Psalm 116:10a, where the psalmist recounts his faith during his past distress (vv. 3, 6, 8). The term 'πίστις' (faith) in this verse refers to the state of believing and, more particularly, to the state of being genuinely devoted to God – being a Christian (BDAG 2000). Since the verse begins with a causal participle built on the present tense stem (ἔχοντες), the beginning of the verse can be rendered as 'because we (continuously) have' (Mounce 2009:245). Thus, it is because in their own affliction Paul and Timothy “have the same spirit of faith” as expressed in Psalm 116 that they likewise believe and therefore also speak in faith. I agree with Kruse (2015:149), who holds that the speaking of Paul and Timothy refers to their gospel proclamation. Such a conclusion is in harmony with Harris' (2005:353) notion that “faith cannot remain silent”. By emphasising his and Timothy's faith in the midst of their afflictions Paul lays the foundation for the following verse 14, as well as for the remainder of this passage, which revolves around the believer's future hope.

¹² Note that Paul has already expressed the same idea in 2 Corinthians 1:6, where he stated that his and Timothy's affliction is for the Corinthians' comfort and salvation.

Verse 14: Because of their faith (v. 13a) Paul and Timothy have great hope and confidence for the future in the midst of their constant afflictions. Verse 14 progresses the previous verse, as Paul moves from believing (v. 13) to knowing (v. 14). The latter refers to such a firm belief that it is equivalent to knowing as a fact. What Paul so firmly believes (or knows) is that the Father, who raised Jesus, will (1) also raise Paul and Timothy with Jesus¹³, and (2) bring them, together with the Corinthians, into his presence. By including the Corinthians Paul, on the one hand, expresses his confidence in them (that they will continue to believe and be saved) and, on the other hand, extends this future hope to them, so that they can likewise be confident and encouraged in the midst of their own struggles.

Verse 15: The beginning of the verse literally reads, 'For everything (is) on account of you'. The preceding verses reveal that 'everything' (τὰ πάντα) refers to Paul's and Timothy's faith (vv. 13-14) and ministry (proclaiming with faith the gospel message; v. 13c) – the latter of which includes a bearing of constant affliction (vv. 7-12). Paul states in a general note that the Corinthians are the reason behind 'everything' (v. 15a) and continues by indicating more concretely the purpose of his and Timothy's faith and gospel proclamation: that (ἵνα) grace extends to more and more of the Corinthians (as they become Christians through conversion), and consequently thanksgiving may increase (v. 15b) due to the converts' grateful response to God's grace. Thus, their faith and ministry are for the benefit of the Corinthians. Finally, the uttered thanksgiving brings glory to God (v. 15c). This glory includes both, a connotation of praise, as well as honour (BDAG 2000). Thrall (2004:344) agrees that Paul's ministry purpose is the (eternal) benefit of his converts and adds that his ultimate purpose, however, is to bring glory to God (v. 15c).

Verse 16: This verse begins with an inference: Paul states that for this reason (διὸ) he and Timothy do not become discouraged (v. 16a). As the surrounding verses (vv. 13-14, 17) clarify, it is because of their future hope that they do not become

¹³ Harris' (2005:353) examination of the 'σὺν Ἰησοῦ' (with Jesus) is helpful: he notes that since Jesus' resurrection has already taken place in the past, Paul's and Timothy's future resurrection 'with Jesus' cannot take place at the same time as Jesus' resurrection. Instead, the 'σὺν Ἰησοῦ' refers to their sharing in Jesus' resurrection in that this resurrection is the first-fruit of the resurrection of the believers.

discouraged in the midst of their current struggles – a conclusion which Thrall (2004:347-348) proposes as well. The remainder of verse 16 presents a contrast between their 'outer nature', which is wasting away, and their inner nature', which is renewed daily. The literary context (4:7-12; 5:2-4) reveals that the decaying 'outer nature' is referring to Paul's and Timothy's physical, impermanent bodies, which undergo constant affliction. On the other hand, the 'inner nature', which is daily renewed, refers to their inner spiritual being (BDAG 2000). Ephesians 3:16-19 seems to be a good example (Kruse (2015:152) argues that it is the *best* example) of what such internal spiritual renewal entails: power in one's inner being through the Spirit, the indwelling of Christ through faith, an understanding and knowledge of Christ's love, and the filling of the fullness of God. To conclude this verse, despite the fact that their fragile bodies constantly undergo physical hardships, Paul and Timothy do not lose heart (v. 16a), because they know that they will be resurrected and be in God's glorious presence (v. 14). In addition, the fact that their inner spiritual being is continuously renewed (v. 16c) certainly also contributes to their encouragement expressed in verse 16a.

Verse 17: As just noted on verse 16, Paul's and Timothy's future hope, which is the subject also of this verse, is the primary reason why they do not become discouraged in the midst of their afflictions (v. 16a; the term 'γὰρ' in v. 17 explicitly establishes this causal link). In this verse Paul puts their affliction into perspective: in light of eternity this affliction, which they encounter constantly and in various ways (vv. 8-12), is slight and momentary. In addition, Paul notes that this affliction is preparing for them “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (the greatness of this glory is emphasised).

Second Corinthians 7:10-11 sheds light on the meaning of the term 'κατεργάζεται' in 4:17, which the ESV translates in this verse as 'is preparing'. In 7:10-11 this same verb is employed three times with the same connotation as in 4:17 (BDAG 2000). The two verses read, “For godly grief *produces* a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief *produces* death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has *produced* in you...” (italics mine). Thus, the term 'κατεργάζεται' in 4:17 could also be rendered as 'brings about' or 'produces'. It becomes clear that Paul's

and Timothy's afflictions actively serve yet another purpose – to bring about eternal glory (i.e., their participation in glorious eternal life in heaven) which they will experience in the future. Yet, as Seifrid (2014:218) appropriately emphasises, it is the suffering itself (apart from any human work) that brings about this future glory. The suffering in verse 17 (“this slight momentary affliction”) must therefore not be understood in any meritorious terms, for its resultant glory is but a gracious gift from God. Consequently, just as the sharing of Christ's sufferings is supplemented by a sharing in his comfort (2 Cor 1:5), in the same way this suffering is ultimately followed by the sharing in his glory (4:17). Both verses therefore reveal a benefit of suffering on account of Jesus, but while the first displays a present and temporary benefit (comfort), the second displays a future and eternal benefit (divine glory).

Verse 18: Paul draws a sharp contrast between the things that are seen (the physical world) and the things that are unseen (the spiritual world). While Thrall (2004:355) points out that the latter category includes eternal spiritual realities, Harris (2005:365) provides some helpful examples of such realities, such as, for instance, the believer's resurrection, the eternal divine glory and the power of God. Paul notes that the things that are seen (which include all of his afflictions) are merely temporary, but the latter are eternal – they last forever, and thus they are truly significant (v. 18c-d). This truth is the reason why Paul and Timothy do not look (or pay careful attention; BDAG 2000) to the visible physical world but to the unseen spiritual world and realities (v. 18a-b). The term 'σκοποῦντων' (looking) is a present participle and as such describes a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245). Just as Paul's and Timothy's afflictions are a continuous reality, likewise their looking to the things unseen is a continuous action. This verse therefore highlights their great and steadfast faith in the midst of their ongoing afflictions.

2.3.2.3. Conclusion

Second Corinthians 4:7-18 builds on the fact that Paul and Timothy are abundantly blessed by God. Not only were they given the privilege to be ministers of God's glorious new covenant (3:6-11; 4:1), but they also received the invaluable treasure of the knowledge of God's glory (4:6). Yet, they have this treasure in a state of utter fragility – while their “outer nature” is wasting away (v. 16b) due to their subjection to

constant and various afflictions (vv. 8-11). Paul explains this apparent discrepancy (which had resulted, to some degree, in criticism and bewilderment among the Corinthians), supplying the purposes behind their severe afflictions: first, in order that the surpassing power, which operates in their apostolic ministry, is clearly shown to be God's, rather than their own (v. 7b-c), and second, so that in addition to Jesus' death his life would also be clearly revealed in their bodies to the people around them (vv. 10-11). Thus, Paul's and Timothy's hardships constitute an important (and even necessary) part of their gospel proclamation.

Despite all their afflictions they do not lose heart (v. 16a). Instead, because they have steadfast faith (v. 13, 18), they have great hope for the future. They primarily find encouragement in their knowledge that they will be resurrected and brought, together with the Corinthians, into God's glorious presence (vv. 14, 17). Yet, they also find encouragement in knowing that in the present their inner spiritual being is daily renewed (v. 16c). Furthermore, their encouragement in the midst of their afflictions surely also stems from the two additional purposes of their suffering, which Paul emphasises. First, their suffering brings eternal benefit to others in that through their affliction-filled-ministry their converts come to saving faith (vv. 12b, 15). Thus, Paul gladly endures his suffering for the sake of others. And second, Paul's and Timothy's afflictions bring eternal benefit to themselves, as these afflictions "produce" eternal glory (v. 17). It is because they share in Jesus' sufferings that they will also share in his glory.

In light of the four purposes of Paul's and Timothy's afflictions noted above, it becomes clear that ultimately all these hardships are shown to be a blessing. Paul and Timothy are thoroughly blessed by God – even through their various ongoing struggles. Thus, in this passage, where Paul reveals that they are blessed in every way and that all things in their lives ultimately are for their good and for the good of others, the principle stated in Romans 8:28 is beautifully illustrated.

It seems that Paul achieves two primary goals through the writing of this passage. On the one hand he gives the Corinthians the right perspective on his sufferings. These sufferings do not in any way discredit his apostolic ministry, but they are in fact a blessing and indeed even a necessity (vv. 7, 10-12, 15, 17). On the other hand Paul

provides encouragement to the Corinthians, who are suffering themselves (2 Cor 1:6-7), by (1) extending his future hope to them, (2) letting them know about the different purposes and blessings of one's suffering on account of Jesus, and (3) providing for them a model to imitate.

2.3.3. Second Corinthians 12:1-10¹⁴

2.3.3.1. Literary context

After Paul has explained various aspects of his apostolic ministry with the Corinthians (chaps 1-7) and exhorted them to give generously towards the collection for the Jerusalem church (chaps 8-9), Paul now dedicates chapters 10-13 to an extended defence of his apostleship. In these chapters he defends himself against suspicions (e.g., 10:2) and false accusations (e.g., 10:10; 11:5-6, 12-15; 12:16), and presents the deceitful nature of his opponents (11:12-15).

Paul starts these three chapters by defending his Corinthian ministry and answering some of the accusations that were levelled against him (10:1-18). He then moves on to contrast his pure ministry with the deceitful ministry of the false apostles (11:1-15), “foolishly” boasts in the things that reveal his weakness (11:16-12:10), continues to defend his ministry and motives (12:11-21), and finally prepares the Corinthians for his upcoming third visit (13:1-14).

Because Paul's boasting in his weaknesses (11:16-12:10) occurs in the context of his apostolic defence (10:1-11:15; 12:11-21), and because his weaknesses are an essential part of his defended ministry (4:7), it can be said that in 11:16-12:10 he also defends his various weaknesses, which are widely known by the Corinthians (see 1 Cor 2:3; and some probably even criticise or doubt him on account of these). Thus, in 11:16-12:10 Paul presents an apology of his weaknesses. In addition, while Paul further defends his ministry (particularly his spirituality) in 12:1-5a, he continues to boast in his weaknesses in 12:5b-10 and presents the reason for this boasting as well as for his contentment in the midst of his struggles (vv. 9-10).

¹⁴ The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 3 in the appendix.

2.3.3.2. Verse-by-verse analysis

Verse 1: The verse literally reads, 'It is necessary (for me) to (continually) boast, although it is not profitable, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.' Because *καυχᾶσθαι* (to boast) is a present infinitive it refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:299). The literary context (11:16-33) reveals that Paul has been boasting in the preceding verses and now he must continue to do so in the following verses in order to continue his apostolic defence. While the verb 'boasting' (*καυχάομαι*) is used five times in 12:1-10, it also appears frequently throughout the letter (21 times). Paul's frequent usage of this verb, as well as his engaging in "foolish" boasting himself (11:16-18, 21), are perfectly understandable in light of the fact that boasting was a widely practised activity in Corinth (11:18a). Since boasting was such a common and seemingly effective way to communicate in the Corinthian environment (11:19-20), Paul decided to also temporarily engage in this foolish practice¹⁵ (11:18b), which in itself does not benefit anyone (v. 1b), in order to effectively defend his apostleship. In verse 1c Paul introduces the new subject of his boasting – visions and revelations from God¹⁶. That Paul thinks it necessary to boast in these strongly suggests that Paul's spirituality was undermined in Corinth. Thrall (2004:773) reaches the same conclusion when she notes that the Corinthians presumably thought Paul to be deficient in regard to visionary experiences. Such an alleged deficiency would explain why Paul deemed it necessary to boast in his visit to heaven.

Verses 2-3: While some of their details differ, these two verses say essentially the same thing. The ESV's renderings of 'third heaven' and 'paradise' are synonymous and refer to heaven, where God dwells. As is evident from verses 6-7 the 'man in Christ' in verses 2-4 does not refer to a third party but to Paul himself. He recounts this heavenly experience, which occurred 14 years earlier, not in the first person, as one would expect, but in the third person, as if he were boasting about someone

¹⁵ Paul's boasting is a continuous action in that he has been boasting (2 Cor 11:16-33) and now continues to do so (12:1-10), yet, his boasting is temporary in that he only boasts for a while in this letter in order to make his point.

¹⁶ 'Visions' is a sub-category of the more general 'revelations'. Harris (2005:831) explains this distinction well by noting that while all visions are revelations, not all revelations come in the form of visions.

else's experience. I agree with Guthrie's (2015:581) explanation that Paul wrote in the third person in order to distance himself from this awesome experience, with the purpose that although he boasts for a brief moment of this powerful encounter, he nevertheless keeps the focus in this passage on his weaknesses, for this explanation fits well into the literary context of verses 2-3, in which Paul is primarily occupied boasting in his weaknesses (11:16-12:10). In addition, although Paul temporarily boasts in this heavenly experience, he remains humble and attributes glory, power and wisdom not to himself, but to God¹⁷.

Verse 4: The verse literally reads, '...and he heard inexpressible words, which man is not permitted to speak.' Paul humbly accepts the fact that, since it is unlawful for him to do so (οὐκ ἐξὸν – from ἔξεστιν: it is lawful), he is not able to speak of the things he heard while he was in heaven, for what he heard is too sacred to be told by man (BDAG 2000).

Verse 5: Paul states that he will not boast on his own behalf (v. 5b), except of his weaknesses (v. 5c). This statement is in harmony with the preceding passage of 11:16-33, where Paul has been boasting of the things that openly reveal his weaknesses (11:30). Yet, in verses 1-5a he does boast (although humbly) about the awesome revelation he has experienced, which Guthrie (2015:584) rightly describes as a “strength”, in order to continue to defend his apostleship and, more specifically, to communicate to his readers that he is in no way inferior to the false apostles (cf. 11:5; 12:11), who seem to have undermined Paul's spirituality while exalting their own¹⁸.

Paul has already made it clear to the Corinthians that if anyone boasts, he must boast in the Lord (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). In verse 5a he applies this principle: he is

¹⁷ First, as just noted, by writing in the third person Paul distances himself from the awesome experience. Second, Paul describes himself not as an apostle but simply as a believer (a 'man in Christ'; v. 2a). Third, Paul employs the passive participle 'ἀρπαγέντα' ('was caught up'), which refers to a passive action. Since his going to heaven was not his own doing but entirely God's, there is nothing to be proud of. And finally, Paul three times humbly acknowledges that while he does not know whether he was brought to heaven in his body or out of his body (i.e., only his spirit was brought to heaven, while his body stayed on earth; vv. 2b, 3b), God knows (vv. 2c; 3c).

¹⁸ Martin's (2014:602) comment that they “probably boasted of visions they did not have” makes perfect sense in light of the fact that they were *false* apostles.

only willing to boast about his experience in heaven because it was not his own doing but God's (v. 3a). Black's (2012:97) remark that Paul was "(involuntarily) snatched up" is in line with this thought and points to the fact that since he never even intended to encounter this particular revelation, how could he possibly boast about it? Consequently, by boasting in this experience he is in fact not boasting on his own behalf but in the Lord, who graciously made this experience possible. In addition, Paul is able to boast in this experience because he has, through his third-person narration in verses 2-4, distanced himself from it.

Verse 6: Paul has just established that he will not boast on his own behalf (v. 5b), except of his weaknesses (v. 5c). He now explains that if he nevertheless wished to boast on his own behalf in regard to the heavenly revelation, he would not make a fool of himself (by telling lies; v. 6a), since he would merely be speaking the truth (v. 6b). While Paul, by implication, makes it clear in this and the following verse that he is in fact the 'man in Christ', he remains convinced that he will not boast of this heavenly revelation as if it were his own experience (v. 6c), for the humble purpose that no one would think too highly of him (v. 6d). Rather than to be judged on the basis of this revelation, which was not his own doing but a gracious gift from God (v. 3a), Paul wants to be judged on the basis of his own actions and speech (v. 6d). It seems likely that Paul aims to instruct the Corinthians how they should not only evaluate him, but also how they should evaluate others (including the false apostles), that is, not based on claimed visions and revelations, but based on one's own words and deeds.

Verse 7: Paul states that a thorn was given to him in the flesh (v. 7b) in order to keep him from becoming proud by the awesome revelations he had received (and particularly his experience in heaven; v. 7a, d). Paul uses the term 'σκόλοψ' (which refers to a thorn or a wooden splinter and implies the causing of injury and discomfort; L&N 1996) figuratively, for he does not bear a literal thorn in his flesh (τῆ σαρκί) but is probably suffering from some physical affliction¹⁹. This thorn is not a

¹⁹ While numerous suggestions have been offered regarding what exactly Paul's thorn in the flesh was (such as headaches, an eye problem, epilepsy or malaria; Thrall 2004:814-816), I shall merely conclude here that it is impossible to know the exact nature of this thorn, since Paul leaves out further explanations.

minor health problem, but something that brought much pain and distress to Paul, for it is described as harassing him (v. 7c). The verb 'κολαφίζω' (literally: to strike sharply with the fist; BDAG 2000), which is also employed to recount the instance when Jesus was beaten by some of those who were present at his trial before the Jewish authorities (Mt 26:67; Mk 14:65), is used figuratively in this verse and refers to a tormenting, the causing of physical impairment (BDAG 2000). In addition, κολαφίζη is a present subjunctive and thus refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:289). It could be translated as 'that it would continually torment me'²⁰. Harris (2005:856) explains that Paul's thorn was continuous in that it was either constant or recurring. Either option is possible and points out the severity of Paul's affliction. According to Lim (2009:187) Paul's humiliating thorn was "visible to the Corinthians" and it must have been one of the reasons why some of them perceived him to be weak (cf. 2 Cor 10:10). While I agree with Lim's argument that the last part of the preceding verse (v. 6d, where Paul refers to the things the Corinthians see in him and hear from him) supports this conclusion, I believe that still a better argument to support the notion is the fact that Paul had no need to explain to the Corinthians what this thorn was.

The passive verb ἐδόθη (it was given) implies that someone actively gave this thorn to Paul. Wallace (1996:142) notes that the clause 'ἐδόθη μοι' (it was given to me) is the "passive transform" of 'ἔδωκεν μοι' (he gave me). Since Paul metaphorically considers this thorn to be a 'messenger of Satan' (v. 7c) one might wrongly conclude that it was Satan who gave the thorn to Paul. Yet, the verse clearly points to God as the giver: Paul notes twice in this verse that the purpose of the *giving* of the thorn was "to keep me from being too elated" (ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι; v. 7a, d). The only other biblical occurrence of ὑπεραίρωμαι, which refers to an exalting of oneself (BDAG 2000), one becoming "puffed up with pride" (L&N 1996), is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, where the man of lawlessness is described as exalting himself (ὑπεραιρόμενος), "proclaiming himself to be God". Thus, while it was God's will for Paul to remain humble, Satan, on the other hand, would have been perfectly content with Paul becoming proud and he would therefore never have given him the thorn to keep him humble.

²⁰ It should be noted here that Paul received this thorn after his heavenly experience 14 years earlier (vv. 2a, 7a-b) and at the time of writing this letter he was still suffering from it.

Because the surpassing greatness (ὑπερβολῆ) of the revelations would have naturally caused Paul to become proud, God gave Paul the thorn with the loving purpose of keeping him humble (v. 7a, d). Yet, the verse also reveals that at the same time the thorn came to him through the agency of Satan. In giving Paul the thorn God allowed Satan to harass him through this thorn (note that this harassment was the devil's purpose; v. 7c). Consequently, Paul regarded the thorn to be both, a gift from God (vv. 9-10), as well as an instrument of the devil to torment him (v. 7c). In his statement that while God deflated Paul's pride, Satan inflicted his suffering, Harris (2005:856) makes a helpful contribution, for he moves beyond the intents and purposes of God and Satan to their actual work in Paul's life.

Verses 8-9: The seriousness of this physical affliction, whatever its exact nature was, is further confirmed by the fact that Paul pleaded with God on three different occasions to take it away from him. Harris (2005:860) convincingly argues that Paul's prayer to 'the Lord' is specifically directed to Christ, since 'the power' (ἡ δύναμις; v. 9b) of which the Lord speaks in his reply to Paul, which is closely connected to the Lord's grace (ἡ χάρις μου; v. 9a), is referred to by Paul as "the power of Christ" (ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ; v. 9d). Verse 9a-b then features Christ's response to Paul, from which it becomes clear that he did not intend to remove the thorn from Paul's flesh and thus kept it in his life for all these years. In his response Jesus assured Paul that his grace is sufficient for him – that whatever grace he needed he would also receive (v. 9a). The sufficiency of divine grace in Paul's life is explained in the following clause, where Jesus reveals that his power is perfected "in (the presence of) weakness" (v. 9b; BDAG 2000). Thus, while there is much weakness in Paul's life, including his thorn, by Jesus' grace there is much divine power as well (in this regard Paul's life is fashioned after that of Jesus; 13:4). Because his weakness allows for Jesus' power to work in and through him, his weakness is not only beneficial for his ministry, but indeed necessary. Rather than taking the thorn away, Jesus told Paul yet another reason why he needed it to be part of his life – in order that divine power can work in him to the maximum²¹ (v. 9b).

²¹ The first reason for why God allowed the thorn in Paul's life, as discussed earlier, was to keep him from becoming proud (2 Cor 12:7a, d).

The tense of the verb 'εἶρηκέν' (he said) in verse 9a is significant: the perfect tense refers to a completed action “whose effects are felt in the present” (Mounce 2009:223), and this particular perfect verb, because it is intensive, emphasises the resulting state of the completed action (2009:235). Thus, what Jesus has just responded to Paul in verse 9a-b has two important resultant effects on Paul in the present (note that the terms 'οὖν' and 'διὸ' (therefore) are employed in vv. 9c and 10a). First, he continues to boast in his weaknesses (v. 9c) – and the knowledge of the great benefit of his weakness (i.e., divine power being at work in it) enables him to do so even more gladly. In fact, the relative superlative 'ἥδιστα' (Wallace 1996:303) may be rendered 'most gladly'. Second, as will be discussed in the following verse, Paul is genuinely content with his weaknesses and hardships (v. 10a).

Verse 9c, in which Paul most gladly boasts of his weaknesses, seems at first sight to indicate that this boasting in itself has the purpose (the term 'ἵνα' is employed) of bringing about the power of Christ in his life. Seifrid (2014:450) rightly cautions against interpreting Paul's boasting in his weaknesses as the “means by which Paul gains Christ's power”, for such an interpretation would contradict Paul's firm belief that salvation comes through grace, rather than works, and is therefore entirely a gift from God (Eph 2:8). It is possible that Paul views his faith, which underlies his boasting in his weaknesses, as the prerequisite that brings about this divine power, as suggested by Seifrid (2014:450-451). In any case, verse 9d reveals Paul's strong desire for Christ's power to rest upon him (or dwell in him; NASB; BDAG 2000) and this he experiences especially when he is weak (vv. 9b, 10b).

Verse 10: The verse literally reads, 'Therefore, I am well pleased with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties, on behalf of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.' Paul is referring here to all the weaknesses and hardships he undergoes because of his commitment to Christ (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ), and notes that he is well pleased with all of these difficult circumstances, which he experiences on a regular basis (2 Cor 11:23-29). Kruse (2015:267) clarifies that Paul does not take pleasure in weakness and hardships themselves, but in his experiencing of Christ's power in the midst of these difficult circumstances. This is confirmed by verse 10b: while, as mentioned earlier, Paul's contentment in verse 10a is a direct result of

Christ's declaration that his power is perfected in weakness (v. 9b), verse 10b once more states this reason for his contentment – whenever Paul is weak (or incapable, limited; BDAG 2000), then in fact he is strong (δυνατός; literally: capable, powerful; BDAG 2000), because Christ provides the power that he lacks. In other words, it is exactly when Paul is at his weakest that Christ's power is most clearly at work in his life, due to his humble reliance upon him, and in that Paul takes pleasure.

2.3.3.3. Conclusion

In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 Paul continues to boast in his weaknesses, which he has been doing in the previous verses (11:16-33). Such boasting has been necessary in order for him to effectively defend his apostleship and to correct the common Corinthian misconception regarding his weaknesses, namely, that his weaknesses, which are readily visible to those around him, are contradicting the powerful and glorious gospel he proclaims (cf. 3:6-11).

Paul starts by boasting in his encounter in heaven, which he has experienced 14 years earlier (vv. 2-5a). He diverges for a brief moment from boasting in his weaknesses and instead boasts in this powerful revelation, in order to defend his spirituality, which seems to have been undermined by his opponents, as well as to provide an occasion for his boasting in his thorn (v. 7ff.). Nevertheless, Paul engages in this necessary boasting in a most humble manner – for instance, by distancing himself from the experience through his third-person narration. Ultimately, he does not boast in an encounter that was not in the least his own doing, but he, in accordance with his exhortation in 10:17, boasts in the Lord, who has graciously allowed him to have this experience.

From verse 5b onwards Paul is back to the theme of boasting in his weaknesses and in verse 7 he starts his discussion on the thorn, which constitutes an essential part of his infirmities, for it continuously causes him much pain and distress. Although Paul considers the thorn to be an instrument of Satan to torment him, he first and foremost acknowledges it to be a gracious gift from God, in which he takes great pleasure, for it serves the loving divine purposes of keeping him humble, as well as to allow for Christ's power to work in and through him. Thus, God allowed him to suffer from the thorn because it brings him great benefit; because it ultimately works for his good (cf.

Ro 8:28). In fact, Paul is genuinely well-pleased in the midst of all the weaknesses and hardships he experiences on a regular basis because of his commitment to Christ, for when he is weak, Christ supplies the power he lacks (vv. 9b, 10b) – not only for his own benefit, but also for the benefit of others, since it is part of the gospel proclamation (similar to 4:10-11).

In order to correct the Corinthians' misconception regarding his weaknesses Paul does not deny them, but openly reveals and boasts in them. He implicitly communicates to the Corinthians that a true apostle is not characterised by human power, but by human weakness, as well as by the divine power that comes with such weakness (after Christ's own example; 13:4). He clarifies that such weakness and difficulty on account of Christ is not contradictory to the message of the gospel, and that weakness is something positive – and even necessary, for only in human weakness can Christ's gracious provision of his power take place and thus be revealed to others.

2.3.4. Philippians 1:18b-24²²

2.3.4.1. Literary context

In Philippians 1:18b-24 Paul presents his positive perspective on both, life and death. The immediate context of this passage (vv. 12-18a, 25-26) talks about the advancement of the gospel through Paul (past and future). The preceding verses present this theme in a progressive manner: Paul's imprisonment has resulted in unbelievers hearing the gospel (v. 13), in believers being encouraged to proclaim the gospel more boldly (v. 14), and in others, who proclaim the gospel with the impure motive of afflicting Paul in his imprisonment, proclaiming the gospel nonetheless (vv. 15, 17). The following verses (vv. 25-26), on the other hand, apply this principle of gospel advancement through Paul directly to the Philippians, and not the past is concerned, but the future: Paul is confident that he will continue to live, so that the Philippians can continue to experience much spiritual growth. Although the topic in verses 18b-24 shifts to Paul's contemplation whether he wishes to be dead or alive, these verses lead up to his reached conclusion in verses 25-26 – that he will

²² The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 4 in the appendix.

continue to live in order to be of great benefit to his readers.

In the wider context Paul exhorts his readers to be fearless, long-suffering, united and humble (1:27-2:5), and supplies them with the examples of the humility of Jesus (2:6-10), Timothy (2:19-23) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30), which they ought to imitate. In light of this wider context Philippians 1:12-24 (and particularly vv. 18b-24) may be regarded as Paul's own example of humility, which his readers likewise need to follow (cf. 3:17) and thus ideally also adopt his perspective on life and death.

2.3.4.2. Verse-by-verse analysis

Verses 18b-19: Paul has just stated that he rejoices in Christ being proclaimed – whether that be by pure or impure motives (v. 18a). In verse 19 he notes yet another reason for his rejoicing in verse 18b: he *knows* that “this will turn out for my deliverance”. The phrase 'τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν' is a quotation from the Septuagint reading of Job 13:16. Witherington (2011) holds that Paul compares his dire circumstances with those of Job. This altogether plausible notion then clarifies what the τοῦτό (this) in verse 19 is referring to, namely, Paul's current troublesome circumstances, in which his imprisonment plays a big role. The term 'deliverance' (σωτηρία) can refer either to physical deliverance or preservation, or to eternal salvation (BDAG 2000). Besides the occurrence in verse 19 Paul employs the term 18 times and in each instance he uses it in the spiritual sense – referring to salvation. Two aspects of the following verse reveal that Paul has salvation in mind here in verse 19 as well, rather than physical deliverance from prison. First, Paul considers that he will need to continue to display great courage (πάση παρρησίᾳ; literally: all boldness; v. 20b), which suggests that Paul considers at least the possibility that he could be sentenced to death. Second, the phrase “whether by life or by death” (v. 20c) reveals even more clearly that Paul does not yet display confidence that he will be released from prison and live (as he does in vv. 25-26). He simply does not know if he will live or die. On the other hand, Paul knows that his σωτηρία will ultimately come to pass, whether he will be freed from prison or sentenced to death (v. 20c).

Hansen (2009:78) notes that the term 'σωτηρία' in verse 19 refers more specifically to Paul's ultimate deliverance (from all his troubles; this interpretation appears to be plausible in light of 2 Tim 4:18) and vindication. That the connotation of vindication

underlies the term 'σωτηρία' in this verse seems to be confirmed by the context of Job 13:16, which revolves around Job's desire and confidence that he will ultimately be vindicated (vv. 15-19). It thus appears that some looked down on Paul because of his troublesome circumstances, and that as a response Paul affirms that his imprisonment is indeed something positive, since it has worked out for good in various ways (vv. 12-18a), and that he will ultimately be delivered and vindicated (v. 19). Paul notes that his troublesome circumstances will turn out for his ultimate deliverance through the prayers of the Philippians and the help (or assistance, support; BDAG 2000) of the Holy Spirit²³. Paul humbly reveals that he is not at all self-sufficient, but that he needs the support of other believers and the Holy Spirit in order to endure and safely reach this goal of ultimate deliverance and vindication. That Paul would show his vulnerability to the Philippians and give them such an honest prayer request is plausible especially in light of the fact that he considers them to be his dear friends and partners (see end of 2.1.2.3.).

Verse 20: Paul writes of his eager expectation (ἀποκαραδοκία, which includes a connotation of desire; L&N 1996) and hope (ἐλπίς) that he will not in the least be ashamed (of the gospel and his own circumstances; v. 20a; cf. Ro 1:16), but that he will display great boldness in his imprisonment and presumably particularly in his upcoming trial (v. 20b). Through such conduct Christ will be honoured (or exalted, glorified; BDAG 2000) in Paul's body, whether he will live (by being freed) or die (by being sentenced to death; v. 20c). This last clause of verse 20 reveals that Paul is at this point uncertain whether he will live or die. All that truly matters to him right now is not the outcome of his trial, over which he has no control, but his response to his circumstances – that he will exalt Christ by continuing to boldly testify about him (v. 16 displays Paul's belief that he is appointed to defend the gospel). While Paul has implicitly requested of the Philippians to pray for him in the previous verse, in this verse the Philippians can learn that they do well to specifically pray for him to continue to be filled with 'all boldness' (πάση παρρησίᾳ).

²³ That 'the Spirit of Jesus Christ' refers to the Holy Spirit is clear from 2 Corinthians 3:17 and Galatians 4:6. The former verse, which talks about the 'Spirit of the Lord' (vv. 14-16 clarify that 'Lord' refers to Christ) is embedded in Paul's discussion regarding the glorious ministry of the (Holy) Spirit (vv. 6-18). The latter verse talks about the 'Spirit of his Son' (i.e., God's Son – Christ) having been sent by God into the hearts of the Galatian believers.

Verses 21-22b: These two verses reveal the reason (the term 'γὰρ' is employed) why Paul does not care as much about the outcome of his impending trial – whether he will live or die (v. 20c), namely, because both options are good. He notes that for him “to live is Christ”²⁴ (v. 21a) and “to die is gain” (v. 21b). The 'dative of feeling' (ἐμοὶ) indicates that Paul is stating his viewpoint, rather than an absolute truth (Wallace 1996:146-147). The good of each option is further explained in the following verses: while 'to live' means fruitful labour for Paul (v. 22b), 'to die' means to be with Christ (v. 23b). If the latter were to happen it would be the cause for great rejoicing (2:17-18). The former option would likewise be of great benefit to Paul, as is highlighted by Paul's word selection. Rather than using the more common adjective-noun construction (καρποφόρον ἔργον; fruitful labour), Paul instead uses a noun and an attributed genitive (καρπὸς ἔργου; literally: fruit of labour). While the second construction also simply means 'fruitful labour', it is more emphatic than the first construction (Wallace 1996:90), and thus the fruitfulness of Paul's labour (and of his being alive in general) is emphasised.

Verses 22c-23a: It is because Paul finds himself in this win-win situation described above that he does not know whether he would rather die or remain alive. Verses 22c and 23a are synonymous, yet, a progression can be found from not knowing (οὐ γνωρίζω) to being hard-pressed (συνέχομαι). The latter includes a connotation of distress (BDAG 2000). So, Paul does not know if he wants to live or die – even to the point of being distressed over the prospect of having to make such a decision. Witherington (2011) provides another helpful description regarding what the term 'συνέχομαι' entails in this context: the picture is that of Paul being caught between two strong desires.

Verses 23b-24: After Paul has shown that he is hard-pressed whether he should prefer to be set free (and thus live) or to be sentenced to death (vv. 22c-23a), he now further explains why this is such a difficult choice for him to make, and in doing so he

²⁴ This ambiguous phrase is variously interpreted. Martin's (1987) suggestion that it means “to live is to glorify Christ” seems possible in light of verse 20b, where Paul expresses his desire to continue to exalt (or glorify) Christ. According to Hansen (2009:82) the phrase refers to Paul's life purpose of striving towards knowing and serving Christ. This proposition complements what Paul states in verse 22b – that to live means fruitful labour for him.

continues his thought process which he started in verses 21-22b. Paul expresses his desire (or longing) to die and be with Christ (v. 23b). The preposition 'σὺν' (with) refers to the “believers' fellowship with Christ” in heaven (Wallace 1996:382). Paul, in supplying the reason for this desire, merely notes that it is “far better” (v. 23c). Although the term 'κρεῖσσον' (better) would have technically sufficed, Paul adds the terms 'μᾶλλον' (to a higher degree, more; BDAG 2000) and 'πολλῶ' (by much; Wallace 1996:167) in order to emphatically point out that his death and consequent fellowship with Christ would be much, much better for him than to remain alive. Paul then adds that the contrasting alternative of remaining alive (literally: to remain in the flesh) is more necessary on account of the Philippians (v. 24). Verse 25 clarifies how Paul's remaining alive is beneficial for his readers – in that they can experience “progress and joy in the faith”. Therefore, despite his longing to be with Christ, Paul is willing to continue his apostolic labours on earth, which are accompanied by constant hardship (2 Cor 4:7-12; 11:23-33), for the benefit of the Philippians (and presumably for that of his other converts as well; vv. 24-25). He is not only willing, but also strongly believes (οἶδα; I know) that it will be so (vv. 25-26)²⁵. Osiek (2000:44) satisfactorily clarifies that this conviction is not Paul's personal preference (this is in line with vv. 22c-23c, from which it becomes clear that Paul, if he merely considered himself, would prefer to be with Christ) but his assured belief of what God will do for the up-building of those who still need him.

2.3.4.3. Conclusion

In Philippians 1:18b-24 Paul reflects on his current circumstances in prison, as he has done already in the preceding verses (vv. 12-18a). His discussion revolves around two main issues, namely, his troublesome circumstances turning out for his ultimate deliverance (regardless of the outcome of his impending trial), which then naturally leads him to think about his life and death, and which would be better for him.

Despite the various hardships Paul experiences on a regular basis (e.g., 2 Cor 4:7-

²⁵ Verses 22a-b and 24 both reveal the benefit of Paul remaining alive. Yet, while verse 22a-b considers the benefit for Paul (i.e., fruitful labour *for* him – 'μοι' (for me) is a dative of advantage), verse 24 considers the benefit for the Philippians. Paul's belief in verses 25-26 that he will remain among the living is primarily based on the latter.

12; 11:23-33), which includes his current imprisonment, he is not at all discouraged but interprets his difficult circumstances (as well as his life and death) in a thoroughly positive light. He highlights three points of particular importance (the first two are explicitly stated to be the cause for his rejoicing; v. 18). First, he has noted in the preceding verses 12-18a that his imprisonment has worked out for the good of others in that the gospel has been advanced in different ways through it. Second, Paul now explains that, no matter how his trial will turn out (v. 20c), he will ultimately be delivered from all his troubles and be vindicated before God (v. 19). Thus, in the midst of his suffering Paul displays great hope for the future. In the meantime, since God has allowed him to be put in prison “for the defense of the gospel” (v. 16), his aim is to glorify Christ by courageously continuing to testify about him (v. 20a-b).

Third, Paul presents his perspective on life and death, describing how both of the possible outcomes of his trial are great options. While “to die is gain” (v. 21b) in that through it he can be with Christ (v. 23b), ‘to live’ means fruitful labour for him (v. 22a-b) and, in addition, brings much benefit to his converts (vv. 24-25). Although Paul’s own personal preference is to die and be with Christ (v. 23b), “for that is far better” (v. 23c), he also desires to remain alive, for this is more necessary for the sake of his converts (v. 24). Thus, Paul is hard-pressed and unable to decide which option to prefer (vv. 22c-23a). Yet, due to the necessity of his converts being further built up, Paul is confident that he will still remain with them. Because his apostolic ministry involves constant hardship (2 Cor 4:7-12), he is therefore, by implication, willing and content to continue to suffer for the sake of his converts (similar to 2 Cor 1:6a).

On the one hand this passage (including vv. 12-18a) supplies the Philippians with an example in how to appropriately deal with suffering (since they too were suffering; 1:28-29) and how to display humility in the midst of such suffering. Paul’s positive perspective on life, hardship and death is both, applicable and beneficial for them. On the other hand, Paul’s positive assessment of his imprisonment and possible upcoming death serves as a means to “justify” his troublesome circumstances, as well as his ministry in general. The three noted major points should be enough to already vindicate him to some degree in the present.

2.4. Survey of other relevant Pauline texts on suffering²⁶

2.4.1. Suffering on account of Christ

When Paul writes about suffering he usually has in mind the suffering he and other believers experience on account of Christ (i.e., due to their commitment to him), as is clear from Paul's usage of the following prepositions. He states, as we have seen earlier, that he is always being handed over to death διὰ Ἰησοῦν (2 Cor 4:11a) and that he is well pleased with his hardships ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ (2 Cor 12:10). The prepositions 'διὰ' and 'ὑπὲρ' both function in these two verses as markers of cause and can therefore be translated as 'because/for the sake of' (BDAG 2000). Likewise, Paul emphatically (the preposition 'ὑπὲρ' is repeated) tells the Philippians that they have been called to suffer ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ (because of Christ; Phil 1:29) and he lets Timothy know that he suffers misfortune for (or because of) the gospel (the preposition 'ἐν', followed by the dative relative pronoun 'ᾧ' (which), reveals the cause of Paul's suffering; 2 Tim 2:8-9). In addition, in Romans 8:36 Paul quotes Psalm 44:22, which reads, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long... ." The term 'ἕνεκεν' indicates the "cause of or reason for something" (BDAG), thus revealing that Paul considers that he always (literally: the whole day) suffers because of Christ. Therefore, when Paul treats the topic of suffering, he normally has in mind the suffering which the believer experiences *on account of Christ*. Consequently, Paul at times employs the idea of 'sharing in Christ's sufferings', which basically means that the believer suffers because of him and in union with him (see section 2.2.1.3. on v. 5). The texts concerning this theme literally read, 'we suffer with (him)' (συμπάσχομεν; Rom 8:17), 'the sufferings of Christ abound in us' (2 Cor 1:5a) and 'that (I) would know...the fellowship of his sufferings' (Phil 3:10).

When it comes to his own life Paul considers *all* that he suffers to be a suffering on account of Christ. He does not distinguish, for instance, between a whipping at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders due to his gospel proclamation (2 Cor 11:24) and a natural calamity, such as a shipwreck (v. 25). Because his entire life revolves

²⁶ The other passages that will be considered in this survey are Ro 5:3-4; 8:17-18, 22-23, 28, 35-39; 12:12; 1 Cor 4:12; 15:30-32; 2 Cor 5:1-5; 6:4-5, 8-10; 7:6-7; 11:23-33; 12:15; 13:4; Gal 4:13; Eph 3:1, 13; Phil 1:12-14, 16, 29-30; 2:17-18; 3:10-11; 4:11-13; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 3:3-4; 5:16-18; 2 Thess 1:7; 2 Tim 2:8-12, 24; 3:11-12; 4:5, 17-18.

around his ministry and because his ministry is characterised by suffering (4:7-12), he considers all of this suffering to be a result of his commitment to Christ. It is because he has been “appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher” of the gospel (2 Tim 1:11-12a) that he suffers (in special abundance).

2.4.2. Suffering as completing Christ's afflictions

Paul considers his sufferings to fill up (ἀνταναπληρῶ; or complete; L&N 1996), in his flesh, “what is lacking in Christ's afflictions” (Col 1:24). In light of verses such as Ephesians 2:8²⁷ and Colossians 1:22²⁸, which point to the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, Christ's afflictions in Colossians 1:24, which are in some respect incomplete, therefore cannot refer to his redemptive suffering on behalf of humanity. Moo (2008:151) confirms this conclusion, noting that in contrast to the term 'πάθημα' (suffering) the used noun 'θλίψις' (affliction) is never employed in the New Testament “for Christ's redemptive sufferings”²⁹. A possible interpretation is that the incomplete afflictions of Christ refer to a certain amount of suffering that believers must endure before he returns (cf. Rev 6:9-11; e.g., Thompson 2005:45; Dunn 1996:116). Yet, since Paul considers his sufferings to be on account of Christ (see the previous section 2.3.1.), as well as a sharing in (and thus a part of) Christ's sufferings (2 Cor 1:5), and because he reckons that suffering is a vital component of his ministry (2 Cor 4:7-12), a more plausible interpretation that reads more naturally is that Paul regards his sufferings to be necessary in order to spread the gospel message, continuing Christ's work (as his witness; cf. Ac 1:8b), and thus completing, in a representational sense, his afflictions.

²⁷ The perfect passive participle 'σεσωσμένοι' (having been saved) refers to a completed action in the past (Mounce 2009:276).

²⁸ The action of the aorist verb "ἀποκατήλλαξεν" (he reconciled) has already happened in the past (Mounce 2009:195).

²⁹ The former term (πάθημα), which is used 9 times by Paul and 16 times by the New Testament writers in general, mostly refers to the redemptive suffering of Christ, as well as to the suffering of the believers as they follow in the footsteps of their Lord. In contrast, the latter term (θλίψις), which appears 24 times in Paul's letters and 45 times in the New Testament as a whole, is more broadly employed for the afflictions that are such a natural part of this world and which thus affect believers and unbelievers alike.

2.4.3. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life

After referring to his persecutions and sufferings in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (2 Tim 3:11), Paul tells Timothy that 'indeed all who (continuously) desire to live in a godly manner (εὐσεβῶς) in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (v. 12). Because the relative clause refers to believers, the verse essentially means that 'indeed all believers will be persecuted'. Thus, to suffer persecution (or harassment, due to one's beliefs; BDAG 2000) is not a lot that is merely given to some, but to *every* believer. Similarly, Paul tells the Thessalonians that they must not be moved (or disturbed) by the afflictions they experience (1 Thess 3:3). The reason which he supplies in this verse is that they (i.e., Paul, his co-authors, the Thessalonians and, by implication, all believers) are destined (or appointed) for 'this' (τοῦτο). That 'this' refers to their afflictions is clear from the following verse, which states that they are to suffer affliction (μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι; literally: 'we are about to be (continually) afflicted'). The fact that the infinitive 'θλίβεσθαι' is built on the present tense stem is significant, for it refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245), or, more appropriately in this context, an ongoing process. In light of the earlier discussed beliefs and values of Greco-Roman society (see section 2.1.1.4.) one can readily see how Paul's notion of a believer being characterised by continued hardship makes perfect sense. Such suffering must, however, not be regarded as some tragedy, but as a privilege that has been *graciously* granted (ἐχαρίσθη) to the believer by God, just as his faith has been granted to him as well (Phil 1:29). Thus, faith and suffering are graciously given to the believer "in a package" – the one does not come without the other.

2.4.4. Suffering for the benefit of the church

Philippians 1:29 naturally gives rise to the question, 'how exactly is the believer's suffering on account of Christ a privilege?' This section, as well as the following three sections, provides an answer to this question by revealing the different benefits of the believer's suffering.

One benefit of Paul's suffering, including even his martyrdom, is that this suffering is *for* his readers (and for the church in general) in that they gain great profit through it. This idea is expressed through Paul's usage of the following prepositions: the

preposition 'ὑπὲρ' can take a variety of meanings, depending on the case of its object and on the context. When 'ὑπὲρ' takes its object in the genitive case it often functions as “a marker indicating that an activity or event is in some entity's interest” and can thus be translated as 'for', 'in behalf of' or 'for the sake of' (BDAG 2000). Paul uses 'ὑπὲρ' in this sense several times in connection to his suffering. In Ephesians 3:1 Paul notes that he is a prisoner on behalf of (ὑπὲρ) his Gentile readers. In addition, while he writes in Ephesians 3:13 that his afflictions are for (ὑπὲρ) the Ephesians, and in Colossians 2:1 that he greatly struggles (against opposition; BDAG 2000) for (ὑπὲρ) the Colossians, he states in Colossians 1:24 in more general terms that he is afflicted for the sake of (ὑπὲρ) the church. He even states in 2 Corinthians 12:15 that he will most gladly be spent for (ὑπὲρ) the Corinthians' souls. Because the future passive verb 'ἐκδραπνηθήσομαι' refers to Paul sacrificing his own life (BDAG 2000), it seems that he expects to be martyred at some point in the future.

In all of these verses Paul's suffering is *for* his readers – it is for their benefit. This notion of Paul benefiting his readers through his suffering is most clearly illustrated in 2 Corinthians 1:6, where he states that he is afflicted for (ὑπὲρ) his readers' salvation and comfort. As noted earlier (see section 2.2.1.3. on v. 6), it is through Paul's ministry that his readers gain salvation, and since this ministry involves hardship, it is when he endures this hardship that his readers gain eternal profit. This interpretation is supported by the context of Ephesians 3:1, where Paul writes that his ministry (“the stewardship of God's grace”) was given to him *for* his readers (εἰς ὑμᾶς; v. 2), as well as by Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 2:10 that he endures everything (i.e., all his sufferings; v. 9) for the sake of (διὰ³⁰) the elect (those whom God has chosen to believe in him and be saved). In this latter verse the purpose of Paul's endurance is explicitly stated: that the elect would obtain salvation with eternal glory. Thus, Paul considers all of his suffering, which is an essential component of his ministry and which he therefore faithfully endures, to be beneficial for the church, for through his ministry many are and will be saved.

³⁰ Although Paul employs a different preposition, it here takes the same meaning as ὑπὲρ in the previously discussed verses. Wallace (1996:369) clarifies that the preposition 'διὰ', when used with an accusative (as is the case in 2 Tim 2:10), can be used as a marker of cause.

2.4.5. Suffering as an opportunity to experience, paradoxically, God's power

Paul, writing from prison, tells the Philippians that just as he is content with experiencing abundance, so he is content and able to endure when he is brought low and when he faces hunger and need, because in his suffering God strengthens him (or empowers him; from ἐνδυναμώω; Phil 4:11-13). Similarly, Paul writes to Timothy that when he previously suffered from opposition and abandonment (vv. 14-16) the Lord stood by him and strengthened him (from ἐνδυναμώω; 2 Tim 4:17). In 2 Corinthians 13:4 Paul states that he is weak in Christ (ἐν αὐτῷ)³¹, yet, his future dealings with his readers will be characterised by divine power (δύναμις). In this way Paul's life is fashioned after that of Christ (v. 4a). In addition, 2 Timothy 2:9 points out that while Paul is suffering in prison (v. 9a), the power of God's word (since it cannot be bound, or imprisoned; BDAG 2000; v. 9b) inspires and enables him to endure his difficult circumstances and to continue with his ministry (v. 10). So, Paul reveals that in the context of weakness and suffering there is, paradoxically, divine strength, so that it is precisely when he experiences such "misfortunes" that he is in fact able, by God's grace, to live by the power of God.

This paradox of divine power in human weakness and suffering, which is more extensively featured in 2 Corinthians 11:23-12:10, is also illustrated in 2 Corinthians 6:8b-10. In this text, which consists of seven contrasting statements, Paul notes that he and Timothy are regarded and treated³² as impostors (or deceivers; πλάνοι), and yet they are truthful, as unknown (i.e., as being insignificant), and yet they are well-known, as dying, and yet they live, as punished, and yet they are not killed, as being sorrowful (due to all of their afflictions), yet they are always rejoicing, as poor, yet they make many rich (i.e., spiritually³³), as having nothing, and yet they possess

³¹ Paul considers his weakness, which includes his suffering, to be a part of being a believer (who is *in* Christ) and thus views it as a natural result of his commitment to him (cf. section 2.3.1.).

³² The verb, which is absent in the Greek text, must be supplied in the translation. While some translations render '(we are) regarded as...' (e.g., CSB, NASB, NIV), the ESV renders 'we are treated as...'. While the former refers to the Greco-Roman society's perception of Paul and his ministry, the latter refers to how this society, as a result of its perception, responds to him as the minister. It seems that Paul has both ideas in mind in this context, in which he defends all aspects of his ministry (vv. 3-10).

³³ Harris (2005:484) agrees with this interpretation, explaining that while πτωχοί (poor) must be understood literally, πλουτίζοντες (making rich) must be understood figuratively. This principle also

everything (an abundance of spiritual blessings). While the first contrasting statement demonstrates the integrity of Paul and Timothy, the following six statements evidence that, although it may often not seem like it to unbelievers, in reality God is powerfully at work in Paul's and Timothy's hardships. Although they undergo difficulties on a regular basis, it is in these difficult circumstances that God protects them and powerfully works in and through them (similar to 2 Cor 4:8-9). Their suffering thus gives them the opportunity to experience God's power.

Finally, this theme of divine power in suffering is also illustrated in 2 Timothy 3:11 and 4:17b, where Paul notes that God has rescued him from suffering and persecution. Thus, there are various ways in which God's power may be manifested in the believer's suffering. For instance, while God may, on the one hand, "merely" preserve the afflicted believer by strengthening him in his suffering, God may, on the other hand, completely deliver him from some affliction.

2.4.6. Suffering as an opportunity to experience God's comfort

In 2 Corinthians 7:6-7 God is stated (v. 6a) and illustrated (vv. 6b-7)³⁴ to comfort the downcast (τοὺς ταπεινοὺς). The articular present substantival participle 'παρακαλῶν' has a continuous force (Mounce 2009:245) and may be translated as 'the one who continually comforts' (or encourages). The preceding verse 5 reveals that the term 'ταπεινοὺς' in verse 6, which refers to those of lower social status in Luke 1:52 and James 1:9, includes here a connotation of being (internally and externally) afflicted and thus refers to those who are characterised by weakness and an "inability to cope" (BDAG) due to this affliction. According to Paul then, suffering provides the opportunity to the downcast to experience God's constant comfort. This notion is featured more extensively in the previously discussed passage of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

2.4.7. Suffering produces eternal benefits for the believer

Second Corinthians 4:17 has already revealed that Paul's afflictions bring about (or

guides my understanding of the following contrasting statement.

³⁴ The fact that God comforts the downcast is also illustrated in the surrounding verses of 2 Corinthians 7:6-7, namely, in verses 4 and 13.

produce) “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison”. That is, Paul's suffering itself (apart from any human work), which is a sharing in Christ's sufferings, will ultimately (and entirely by grace) be followed by the sharing in his glory. This idea is also expressed in Romans 8:17, which states that 'we suffer with him in order that we would also be glorified with him'. This verse, since the term 'ἵνα' is followed by the subjunctive 'συνδοξασθῶμεν', reveals that the purpose (Wallace 1996:474) of the believer's suffering with Christ (συμπάσχομεν) is to ultimately also be glorified with him (συνδοξασθῶμεν). Just as in 2 Corinthians 4:17, here also the sharing in Christ's suffering brings about the sharing in his glory. Hultgren (2011:317) confirms this conclusion, stating that “to be glorified with Christ means to share in his glory”. Furthermore, in Philippians 3:10-11 Paul expresses his desire to share in Christ's sufferings (literally: 'to know the fellowship of his sufferings') and thus to become “like him in his death”, so that he would attain the resurrection from the dead³⁵. Finally, in 2 Timothy 2:12 the believer's endurance (of suffering; vv. 9-10) results in his reigning with Christ in heaven. So, for the believer suffering on account of Christ is a privilege in that it brings him future eternal benefits, that is, it brings about, by God's grace, his resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:10-11), his sharing in Christ's glory (Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:17), as well as his reigning with Christ in heaven (2 Tim 2:12a).

One additional aspect that must be discussed at this point is the conditional statements in Romans 8:17b and 2 Timothy 2:11b-12a, where the believer's suffering appears to be meritorious. The former text states that believers are children and heirs of God, as well as “fellow heirs with Christ”, *if* indeed (εἴπερ) they suffer with Christ (συμπάσχομεν), and the latter quotes a saying that believers will live with Christ *if* they “have died with him” (εἰ γὰρ συναπεθάνομεν) and they will reign with him *if* they endure (εἰ ὑπομένομεν). Does Paul then consider suffering in meritorious terms, thus contradicting the notion that salvation is by grace alone, not works (cf. Rom 4:2-3; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9)? This question must be answered negatively. Since for Paul all believers are naturally characterised by suffering (see section 2.3.2. above), the conditional statements in the two texts under examination could as well be rendered

³⁵ Note that Paul clearly establishes that verses 10-11 must not be understood in meritorious terms, for he has just clarified in the preceding verse 9 that his righteousness comes not from his adherence to the law, but from his faith in Christ.

'if you are a believer'. That is, a person is a child of God (who will live and reign with Christ) if he is a believer and as such suffers as a natural consequence of his commitment to Christ. Thus, as a believer this condition of suffering is “automatically” fulfilled³⁶. Witherington (2006:94) argues along these lines, stating that suffering serves as a confirmation that one is a Christian.

Hultgren (2011:316) agrees that suffering in these verses is not meritorious and adds the helpful insight that the conditions include a hortatory element, so that Paul's readers find themselves encouraged to continue to suffer for Jesus' sake. In these verses the emphasis does therefore not lay on whether Paul's readers fulfil the condition of suffering for Jesus or not, since these first class conditions are assumed to be true by both Paul and his readers (Wallace 1996:694), but on the promise of the believer's future life, glory and reign.

2.4.8. Future hope in suffering

While the verses discussed in the previous section revealed that suffering produces eternal benefits, at the same time these verses must be considered part of this section as well, for they also express Paul's future hope in the midst of his suffering. In addition to these, several other texts are of significance in regard to the believer's future hope in suffering. In 2 Timothy 4:18a Paul declares that the Lord will rescue him (i.e., rescue from danger, deliver; BDAG 2000) “from every evil deed”. While he is suffering from opposition and abandonment (vv. 14-16), Paul is hopeful and looks forward to his ultimate deliverance from all of his present troubles. Not only that, but he will also be safely brought by God “into his heavenly kingdom” (v. 18b). In 2 Thessalonians 1:7 Paul encourages his readers, who are thrice stated to be afflicted in verses 5-7, with the fact that they will be granted relief (ἀνεσις refers to a cessation of trouble and difficulty; L&N 1996) at the time of God's judgement at the second coming of Christ (vv. 5-9). In that moment the suffering believers will be relieved of all their difficulties.

³⁶ While Schreiner (1998:432) and Moo (1996:505-506) rightly note that the εἴπερ συμπάσχομεν in Romans 8:17 is a real condition, they fail to note that all believers are assumed to fulfil this condition and thus one could easily deduce that they speak of suffering in meritorious terms – that believers would have to ensure that they suffer enough in order to be saved.

After stating that the believer's suffering with Christ will ultimately result in the believer also being glorified with him (Rom 8:17b), Paul takes a step further and compares this present suffering with the future glory. He reckons that the former is “not worthy to be compared” with the latter (v. 18; NASB). The negated adjective 'ἄξια' (not worthy) points to the fact that in light of the exceedingly great future glory (this glory will be so great that even the creation eagerly longs for it; v. 19) the present sufferings are so small and insignificant that they are not even worthy of comparison. This awesome glory will be revealed *to* the believer (they will be able to witness the divine glory in heaven), as well as *in* the believer (they will receive glorious eternal bodies). While some Bible translations render the preposition 'εἰς' as 'in' (e.g., KJB, NIV), others translate it as 'to' (e.g. ESV, NASB). While the first option reads more naturally, either rendering can be reasonably supplied.

In the following verse 23 Paul writes that the believers groan (στενάζομεν; as a “result of deep concern or stress”; L&N 1996) inwardly, just as the creation also groans (vv. 19-23). Because Paul here links the believers' suffering to the suffering that is generally present in the world, it is plausible to suggest, as Moo (1996:511) does, that Paul has in mind in this paragraph not only the believers' suffering on account of their commitment to Christ, but *all* of their suffering in general (including, for instance, illness and natural calamities). In all of this “general” suffering the believers eagerly await (ἀπεκδεχόμενοι) their adoption as sons, the redemption of their bodies (v. 23b). The present participle 'ἀπεκδεχόμενοι' refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245) “occurring at the same time as the main verb” ('we groan'; 2009:253). Thus, while the believers suffer and groan on a regular basis, just as the rest of creation does, at the same time they continuously await with eagerness the full realization of their adoption, as well as their bodies' redemption (i.e., the freeing of their bodies “from earthly limitations”; BDAG 2000). Just as their suffering is continuous, so is their hope (vv. 23b-25).

The final passage to be considered here is 2 Corinthians 5:1-4. The term 'γὰρ' links this text with the previous verses (4:16-18), which revolve around the believer's future hope due to the awaiting eternal glory that is “beyond all comparison” (v. 17). In verses 1-4 Paul contrasts the believer's “earthly home”, which is portrayed

figuratively as a tent, with his “heavenly dwelling”, which is figuratively described as a building (οικοδομή) and house (οικία) from God. While the former refers to the believer's earthly body, the latter (his heavenly dwelling; οίκητήριον) refers to his glorified resurrection body (BDAG 2000). The phrase 'not made with human hands' in verse 2 implies that God is the creator and giver of this glorious future body. It will be given when the believer's “tent” is destroyed (i.e., when he dies; v. 1). Then his mortal body will be “swallowed up by life” (ζωή, which refers to the indestructible life in heaven; BDAG 2000; v. 4b).

While the present “tent” is temporal, the future “house” is eternal and, by implication, qualitatively much better. Verses 2 and 4a, which resemble Romans 8:23, note that believers (continuously) groan in their present “tent” (due to their ongoing suffering; the present passive participle 'βαρούμενοι' (being burdened, oppressed; BDAG 2000) in verse 4 refers to a continuous action; Mounce 2009:245). Yet, at the same time believers have a constant hope for the future, as they *continuously* long for (the present participle 'ἐπιποθοῦντες' is employed in verse 2) the putting on of their heavenly dwelling. In fact, this heavenly dwelling, since it means to be with God, is even preferred by believers over their earthly life (v. 8b). So, in the midst of their constant groaning believers have great hope for the future; they are *always* (πάντοτε) of good courage (vv. 6a, 8a).

2.4.9. Suffering works together for the believer's good

Paul writes in Romans 8:28 that for believers “all things work together for good” (πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν). The verb 'συνεργεῖ' is either transitive, with God as the implied subject and 'all things' as the direct object ('he works all things together for good'), or intransitive, with 'all things' as the subject and no present direct object ('all things work together for good'). In either option God's sovereignty is emphasised (Wallace 1996:181), for all things in the believers' lives are directed by God to their ultimate advantage. While it is true that 'all things' also includes the believer's suffering, this link to suffering is more directly established by the context (vv. 17-39), which revolves around suffering.

The Pauline notion that suffering works together for the believer's good has been illustrated throughout this chapter – especially on texts such as 2 Corinthians 1:9,

12:7 and Philippians 1:12-18a. Further illustrations of this principle are found in Galatians 4:13, where Paul notes that he initially preached the gospel to the Galatians because of (διό) a bodily ailment³⁷, as well as in Romans 5:3-4, where Paul displays that suffering produces (or brings about) endurance, which in turn produces character (δοκιμήν; due to one's going through and standing a test; BDAG), which then produces hope. As a result of knowing the truth of the latter verse Paul states that 'we boast in our afflictions' (v. 3a; the causal participle 'εἰδότες' (because we know) reveals the reason of the verb 'καυχώμεθα' (we boast); Wallace 1996:631).

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:31b that he “dies” every day and asks his readers in verse 30, 'why are we in danger every hour?' His point is that if the dead were not raised, then all their sufferings would be pointless. But since, as he argues in verses 29-32, the resurrection is true, their suffering has value. Similarly, in asking the next question in verse 32 Paul implies that if the resurrection were not true, he would gain nothing from his suffering (from his fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus³⁸). Yet, because the dead will be resurrected, there is indeed gain in his suffering. Thus, in addition to arguing for the truthfulness of the resurrection, Paul establishes in verses 30-32 that the believers' suffering is not worthless, but there is gain in their suffering, and it can be demonstrated once more that suffering therefore works for the good of the believers.

2.4.10. The believer's appropriate response to suffering

In light of the various benefits of suffering and the notion that suffering ultimately works together for the good of the believer, it is not surprising that Paul urges his readers to patiently endure it and rejoice in it. Paul commands his readers in Romans 12:12 to continuously endure in tribulation. There the present participle

³⁷ Although Philippians 1:12-18a and Galatians 4:13 primarily illustrate how Paul's imprisonment and “bodily ailment” have worked together for the good of *others*, at the same time these texts also illustrate how these difficult circumstances have worked together for his own good – in that they have brought him great joy (Phil 1:18) and much fruitful labour (cf. Phil 1:22a).

³⁸ Garland (2003:721) notes that the 'wild beasts' plausibly refer to the bloodthirsty human opponents with whom Paul had to deal with regularly. That Paul would employ such a metaphor is possible, especially in light of Galatians 5:15, where he figuratively speaks of the possibility of his readers biting and devouring one another. Yet, Paul could have just as well had in mind a literal fighting with some wild beasts.

'ὑπομένοντες', which refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245), functions as an imperative (Wallace 1996:651). In addition, he commands Timothy to endure suffering (κακοπάθησον; 2 Tim 4:5). Similarly, Paul notes in 2 Timothy 2:24 that the Lord's servant must be patient (ἀνεξίκακον), that is, endure evil without resentment (BDAG). This response to suffering is exemplified by Paul and the other apostles, who are stated to endure while (continuously) being persecuted (1 Cor 4:12).

Moreover, Paul commands the Philippians (Χαίρετε...πάντοτε; Phil 4:4) and the Thessalonians to always rejoice (πάντοτε χαίρετε; 1 Thess 5:16) and to “give thanks in all circumstances” (ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε; v. 18). This also includes their sufferings. Paul emphatically urges the Philippians to rejoice if he were to be martyred (the two imperatives 'χαίρετε' and 'συνχαίρετέ' are employed; Phil 2:18), just as he himself would rejoice (v. 17). Another reason why believers can and should rejoice in the midst of their sufferings (in addition to the two reasons noted in the preceding paragraph) is the fact that suffering cannot separate them from God's love. This is clear from the rhetorical question in Romans 8:35b, as well as from the explicit statement in verses 38-39. Even when believers are suffering, they can be assured of and find solace in God's love for them.

2.5. Conclusion

In an attempt to draw up a Pauline theology of suffering this chapter has researched some issues regarding the historical-cultural background of such a theology, presented an exegetical study on four key passages on the topic (2 Cor 1:3-11; 4:7-18; 12:1-10; Phil 1:18b-24) and conducted a survey on the other relevant texts. It has become clear that Paul dedicates much space to issues related to the believers' suffering. In most texts he has in mind their suffering on account of Christ, that is, due to their commitment to him (typically persecution and opposition). Only in Romans 8:23 does Paul explicitly broaden the believers' suffering to include all of their suffering in general (i.e., suffering that is not directly related to their commitment to Christ), including, for example, a sickness or natural calamity. In the texts we have examined Paul consistently presents the reason for his own suffering, since his entire life revolves around his ministry, to be on account of Christ.

In the Pauline texts examined in this chapter the apostle presents suffering as a normal component of the believer's life and holds that *every* believer is called to be continually afflicted, since faith and suffering go hand in hand. Because a believer essentially follows Jesus' own example of suffering, he is considered to share in this suffering. The believer's suffering, which is not meritorious, is thus experienced *because* of Jesus and *in union with* him. Yet, such suffering on account of Jesus is in reality a privilege that is graciously granted by God to the believer, for such suffering has various benefits: first, suffering presents an opportunity to the believer not to rely on his own limited strength, but on God's perfect strength and power. And consequently, it is an opportunity to experience this divine power, which is, paradoxically, perfected in the believer's weakness and suffering, for God graciously enables and empowers those believers who experience misfortune. A believer is thus characterised by weakness and the divine power that comes with it. This divine power can come in different forms, such as complete deliverance or mere preservation and strengthening. Although it may often not seem like it, in reality God is powerfully at work in and through the suffering believer, as well as in his hardships, so that it is when the believer is weak that in fact he is strong, for God then supplies the lacking power. The divine power, since believers are fragile like clay jars, also has the purpose to reveal that it clearly comes from God, and thus it constitutes part of the believer's (non-verbal) gospel proclamation.

Second, suffering presents an opportunity to the believer to experience God's comfort, for God comforts and encourages the downcast. Because God the Father is the ultimate source of all mercy, compassion and comfort, which comes through Jesus, suffering believers can abound in constant and joyous comfort. While the God-given comfort on the one hand brings relief to the believer, on the other hand this experienced comfort enables him to comfort others who are suffering – with that same comfort. Third, suffering produces eternal benefits for the believer in that his suffering will, by God's grace, ultimately be followed by eternal blessings, namely, his resurrection from the dead (making it possible for him to enjoy glorious eternal life in heaven), his sharing in Christ's awesome glory, as well as his reigning with him in heaven. It is because the believer shares in Christ's sufferings that he will ultimately also share in his divine glory. And fourth, suffering does not only bring benefits to the

believer himself, but to the church as well. It is Paul's affliction-filled-ministry that results in numerous conversions, as well as in the up-building of many believers, and thus, it is through his suffering that the church gains eternal profit. This includes the fact that the believer's suffering constitutes part of the gospel proclamation, through which many are saved, since, in accordance with 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, it is through the believer's suffering that the power of God in his life is clearly shown to be God's, and that consequently the life of Jesus is manifested to others. Paul can therefore confidently proclaim that his suffering is *for* the church, that is, for the salvation of his converts (2 Cor 1:6a).

Because the believer's suffering has various benefits and good purposes, as can be seen again and again in Paul's writings, this suffering ultimately works together for his good (and often for the good of others – especially the church's). God sovereignly directs the experienced hardships to serve the believer's advantage. His suffering is neither pointless nor disadvantageous, but is a blessing and frequently even a necessity, for it brings him and the church great gain. Naturally, rather than getting discouraged, fearful and hopeless in the midst of his trials, the believer ought to respond to his suffering with patient endurance, genuine contentment and joy, as well as complete reliance on God – after the example of Paul himself. Such a response is also warranted by the fact that even when the believer suffers, he can be assured of God's love for him and find solace in it. In regard to Paul's own response to hardship he at times also resorts to boasting in his sufferings. In the texts considered in this chapter he does this in order to effectively defend his apostleship and correct the common misconception that his sufferings are contradictory to the glorious and powerful gospel he proclaims, as well as that his sufferings are a shameful tragedy. Because his sufferings are beneficial in numerous ways and are part of God's good and loving purposes for him, these sufferings are something to rejoice in, to be proud of and consequently to boast in.

The most commonly repeated theme in Paul's letters in regard to suffering is the notion that in his continuous hardships the believer has great hope for the future. He can know that his afflictions are slight and momentary in comparison to the eternal glory that is awaiting him in heaven. Even when constantly and severely afflicted, the

believer continuously has hope, for he knows that he will be resurrected and brought safely into the glorious presence of God, where he will be delivered from all his troubles, be vindicated before him, be adopted as his son and reign with him. This future fellowship with God will be far better than life on earth.

Chapter 3

An exegetical study of key passages on suffering in the Apostolic Fathers

3.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the Apostolic Fathers' writings on suffering in order to discover their views on and responses to suffering. The chapter first sheds light on some important issues regarding the historical-cultural background of their theology of suffering, then presents an exegetical study of four key passages (*1 Clem.* 45:7b-8; *Ign. Rom.* 5:1-3; *Ign. Smyrn.* 4:2; *Pol. Phil* 8:2-9:2), which treat the topic of suffering most extensively and diversely (see section 1.4.), and finally conducts a survey on the remaining relevant texts.

3.2. Historical-cultural background of the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering

3.2.1. The cultural milieu of the Apostolic Fathers

3.2.1.1. *Christian suffering at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders*

It has been demonstrated in the previous chapter (see section 2.2.1.3.) that the church, from its earliest days, underwent fierce opposition by the Jewish religious leaders, and that commonly the Jewish Christians, many of whom remained within the synagogue, were gradually expelled from it. This Jewish opposition continued (although, as it seems, to some lesser degree; Hinson 1995:49) even throughout the

last decades of the first century and the first decades of the second. Due to the ongoing competition, hostility and suspicion between Christianity and Judaism the two groups grew increasingly distant from one another, and those Jewish Christians who still had access to the synagogue continued to be gradually thrown out (Holmes 2011:10-11).

While the opposition of the Jewish religious leaders was initially directed only towards the Jewish Christians (Fredriksen 2014:40), it appears that at a later stage in the first century some churches in general (i.e., including its *Gentile* members) experienced their opposition, such as was the case with the church in Smyrna (Rev 2:9) at around A.D. 95. The Jews' slander (βλασφημία) in Revelation 2:9b contributed in some way to the Smyrnaean believers' suffering, which included imprisonment and even death (vv. 9a, 10). When one considers the historical context of the book of Revelation (i.e., Roman persecution of Christians under Domitian; see the following section), it seems that this slander refers to some of the Jews' informing against the Smyrnaean Christians to the Romans, which led to their persecution and suffering. Thus, I agree with Blount (2009:54) who argues that this slanderous betrayal is the reason why the Jews in verse 9c are denounced, as they are described as “a synagogue of Satan”³⁹.

3.2.1.2. *Christian suffering at the hands of the Romans*

From the Roman government: Christians were actively persecuted by the Roman government for the first time in A.D. 64-65. This persecution under the emperor Nero took cruel dimensions⁴⁰. However, it was local – in that it was limited to Rome, and temporal – it ended in A.D. 65 (Guy 2004:63). This event had a crucial effect on the Romans' view and treatment of Christians in the following decades. First, with Nero the Romans started to differentiate between Christianity and Judaism⁴¹ (formerly Christianity was viewed by the Romans as a sect within the legally protected Judaism; DeSilva 2004:106). And second, although, as it seems, no official law

³⁹ It is probably for the same reason that the Jews in Philadelphia are likewise labelled as a “synagogue of Satan” in Revelation 3:9.

⁴⁰ For the reason behind and circumstances of the Neronian persecution see section 2.2.1.4.

⁴¹ Note that Nero did not blame and persecute the Jews as a whole, but the Christians in particular (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2).

declared Christianity illegal, it nevertheless became widely known that in fact it was (Williams 2012:220-221). The mere profession of being a Christian – even during the decades following the Neronian persecution, was considered a punishable offence if one was formally charged in a Roman court (2012:179).

There is no evidence of another Roman persecution of Christians within the half-century following that of Nero, except of the persecution during the reign of Domitian at the close of the first century⁴². The extent of this persecution is uncertain, although 1 Clement, which is usually dated at around A.D. 96 (Gregory 2006:227), seems to suggest some persecution in Rome (*1 Clem.* 1:1; 7:1), and the book of Revelation, which was probably written in about A.D. 95-96⁴³ (Malick 2014), points to persecution in parts of Asia Minor (Rev 2:2-3, 9-10, 19; 3:10).

In instances where believers were punished and executed for being Christian during the last decades of the first century and the first decades of the second, it was frequently not the Roman government that initiated such opposition against the church⁴⁴ (however, sporadic local persecutions did take place in particular provinces; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.33.2), but rather the anti-Christian Greco-Roman society (Praet 2014:42), which took offence at the Christians' refusal to sacrifice to the gods (DeSilva 2004:105), as well as at their perceived anti-social nature (Hartog 2010:51) and hatred of mankind (cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.3). Because the Roman governors had numerous concerns and issues to sort out, they were often reluctant to deal with complaints against Christians, who comprised still a relatively small number of

⁴² While 1 Clement 1:1 and 7:1 may refer to the effects of this persecution on the Christians in Rome, the book of Revelation indicates that the church in Smyrna (Rev 2:9-10) was fiercely persecuted, and suggests that the churches in Ephesus (2:2-3), Thyatira (2:19) and Philadelphia (3:10) likewise suffered persecution, for they are said to have endured patiently. In addition, Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.20.1-8) records that the emperor Domitian questioned two relatives of Jesus and that after his examination he released them and made a decree in order to stop the persecution of the church (20.7).

⁴³ Note that the writing date of Revelation is debated by scholars.

⁴⁴ This is also evident from the correspondence between the Bithynian governor Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan, which is dated around A.D. 112 (Cairns 1996:90): Trajan wrote that Christians are not to be sought out (i.e., actively persecuted). However, if one is publicly accused of being a Christian and as such convicted in court, and if he does not renounce Christianity, he then ought to be punished (*Ep. Tra.* 10.97). The earlier letter of Pliny, with which Trajan agrees, reveals that the punishment is execution (*Ep. Tra.* 10.96).

people. But mob pressure from Greco-Roman society frequently proved to be an effective tool and thus played a big role in the conviction and death of Christians (Guy 2004:51-52). As a result, a significant (yet, not massive) number of believers were martyred during the church's first century (2004:78). For instance, Polycarp, whose death is commonly dated at around A.D. 156 (Holmes 2011:301), was merely the twelfth martyr in Smyrna (*Mart. Pol.* 19:1).

From Greco-Roman society: Christians continued to suffer from society's prejudices, suspicions, opposition and rejection (see section 2.2.1.4.). They experienced ongoing unofficial persecution by society, into which they could not be fully integrated, for it was thoroughly shaped and characterised by pagan religion (Green 2010:120). It only seems logical that society's suspicion, reproach and slander against Christians, coupled with the latter's withdrawal from various social events, naturally resulted in their suffering economic and political disadvantages, as proposed by DeSilva (2004:106). This is illustrated in Revelation 2:9, where the Smyrnaean Christians' poverty appears to be a part of the sufferings they experienced on account of their faith.

3.2.2. General background and historical context of 1 Clement, Romans, Smyrnaeans and Philippians

3.2.2.1. First Clement

The letter of 1 Clement was sent by the church in Rome to the church in Corinth (*1 Clem.* salutation) and was, according to ancient tradition (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.23.11), penned down by a certain Clement, who seems to have been a (or *the*) leading figure among the elders in the church in Rome (Holmes 2011:34-35). Thus, the letter, which is usually dated at around A.D. 96⁴⁵ (Gregory 2006:227), must have been written from the capital city. The letter was occasioned by the Corinthian church's unfortunate return to strife and competition – an “unholy schism” (*1 Clem.* 1:1), which was prompted by a rebellion against the church's elders (47:6) – some of whom were removed despite their blameless conduct (44:6). While this church had

⁴⁵ Holmes (2011:36) points out that if 1 Clement 1:1 does not refer specifically to persecution in Rome, then the letter's date of composition can be more generally placed somewhere within the last two decades of the first century.

previously been characterised by humility, generosity, contentment (2:1) and profound peace (2:2), it later responded to the God-given glory and growth (3:1) by becoming, once again, as it had been during Paul's time several decades earlier (cf. 1 Cor 1:11-12; 3:3-4), competitive and divided: the church was now characterised by jealousy, strife, dissension, sedition, rebellion against its elders, internal conflict, disorder and schisms (*1 Clem.* 3:2-3; 46:5, 9; 47:6), and its members no longer walked in righteousness and the fear of God (3:4). Consequently, the purpose of the letter was to lead the Corinthians to repentance (7:4-8:5; 48:1; 51:1) and to bring them to root out their jealousy (63:2) and factions (48:1; 50:2), by returning to humility (13:1; 48:6; 57:2), love (49:1-50:5), submissiveness to their leaders (57:1; 63:1) and obedience to God in general (9:1; 13:3; 40:1; 63:1). The primary concern of the Roman church was that their Corinthian brothers and sisters would be united again, that is, "attain peace without delay" (63:2, 4; 65:1).

3.2.2.2. *Romans*

The letter of Romans was written by Ignatius (*Ign. Rom.* salutation), who was the bishop of Antioch in Syria (2:2; 9:1; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.22, 36). Having addressed this letter to the church in Rome (*Ign. Rom.* salutation), he wrote it from Smyrna (10:1) shortly before his death some time in the beginning of the second century (between A.D. 100 and 113; Maier 2002:147). At the time of writing he was being led to Rome as a prisoner guarded by soldiers (*Ign. Rom.* 4:3; 5:1; 10:2). It was his upcoming arrival in Rome (10:2) that prompted Ignatius to write this letter, in which he informed the Christians there about his situation and his ultimate desire to be martyred (6:1; 7:2). His letter had two primary purposes: first, to communicate to his readers that they must not try to prevent his martyrdom but allow it (2:2; 4:1; 6:3). That is, they must not pray for his release, nor use the church's influence to secure for him lenient treatment from the Roman authorities⁴⁶ (1:2-2:1; Lawson 2005:128), which could have not only resulted in his release, but with it also in the spreading of rumours that he must have committed apostasy (Holmes 2011:169). Instead, the readers must love Ignatius by desiring his death just as he does (*Ign. Rom.* 8:3). And second, he intended to ask his readers to pray for him – that he would have the

⁴⁶ This suggests that the church in Rome, or at least some of its members, were privileged with a high status and were able to enjoy good relationships with the imperial authorities.

strength to bravely, faithfully and willingly endure the imminent sufferings (3:2; 4:2; 8:3). At the same time Ignatius urged the Roman church to pray for the church in Syria – now that he was absent (9:1), and to refresh those believers who preceded him on his way to Rome (10:2).

3.2.2.3. *Smyrnaeans*

Ignatius wrote this letter to the church in Smyrna (Ign. *Smyrn.* salutation). He wrote it from Troas (12:1) while he was brought from Syria to Rome as a prisoner (4:2; 10:2; 11:1; Ign. *Rom.* 5:1) “some time between A.D. 100 and 113” (Maier 2002:147). It appears that his writing was prompted by the presence of docetic false teachers in Smyrna, some of whom were probably welcomed into the church (Ign. *Smyrn.* 4:1; Maier 2002:156). These constituted a threat to its well-being, for they denied that Jesus had a physical body and thus claimed that his sufferings were merely illusory (Renwick and Harman 2004:26). Consequently, the letter had the primary purpose of emphatically establishing the fact that Jesus had lived, died and was resurrected in the flesh, rather than as a mere phantom (Ign. *Smyrn.* 1:1-3:3; 12:2), and to warn the Smyrnaean church not to be misled by anyone who believes and teaches otherwise (6:1). Indeed, they were not even to associate with such unbelievers (4:1; 7:2), for they denied and blasphemed Christ (5:2; 7:1), and contrasted the mind of God (6:2). However, the Smyrnaean believers needed to pray for them (4:1). In addition, Ignatius had two secondary concerns: first, he exhorted the church in Smyrna to be unified by obeying their bishop and elders, respecting their deacons, as well as to not do anything behind the bishop's back (8:1-9:1). And second, he communicated to the Smyrnaeans that they should send an ambassador with a letter to the church in Syria to congratulate them for regaining peace and order (11:2-3).

3.2.2.4. *Philippians*

This letter was written by Polycarp, together with some elders, to the church in Philippi (Pol. *Phil* salutation), which experienced some kind of persecution and hatred (12:3). Polycarp seemingly wrote this letter “very close to the time of Ignatius' death” (13:2; Holmes 2011:276), which took place between A.D. 100 and 113 (Maier 2002:147), and likely wrote from Smyrna, where he was the bishop (Ign. *Pol.* salutation). The epistle was occasioned by the Philippians' request for (1) a teaching

on righteousness (Pol. *Phil* 3:1) and (2) copies of the various letters in Polycarp's possession, which included those that Ignatius had written to him (13:2). Thus, Polycarp's primary purpose of writing and delivering this letter was to meet these two requests (3:1; 13:2). He exhorted the Philippians to live righteously – following God's commandments (2:2; 4:1; 5:1; 6:3; 9:1), as well as to avoid any unrighteous behaviour (2:2; 11:1). By describing both, the good deeds that must be performed (2:3; 4:2-3; 5:2; 6:1; 7:2; 10:1; 12:3), as well as the evil deeds that must be avoided (2:2; 4:3; 5:2-3; 6:1), and by, at times, giving specific instructions to groups of people (i.e., wives (4:2), widows (4:3), deacons (5:2), younger men, younger women (5:3) and elders (6:1)), Polycarp clarified what exactly such righteous living looks like. In addition, Polycarp had several other purposes in mind when composing this letter, such as to warn the church against docetists and other false teachers (7:1), to encourage the church to patiently endure its sufferings on account of Christ (8:2-9:1) and to urge the church not to reject its straying members, such as the erring Valens and his wife, but to allow them to repent and be restored (11:4).

3.3. Exegetical study of four key passages on suffering in the Apostolic Fathers

3.3.1. First Clement 45:7b-8⁴⁷

3.3.1.1. Literary context

In chapter 44 Clement describes how the Corinthian church has unjustly deposed some of its elders who had been rightfully appointed leaders and who had served in the church humbly and blamelessly. In the following chapter (45:1-7a) he argues that in the Scriptures, however, the righteous had never “been thrust out by holy men” (v. 3), but that they were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and killed by the unrighteous. In the passage under examination (45:7b-8) Clement then states that God is the champion and protector of the righteous, and that those in the Scriptures who had patiently endured were exalted and received glory and honour. In the next two chapters (chaps 46-47) Clement exhorts the Corinthians to follow the example of those who faithfully endured (46:1) and to join (or cling to) such righteous people

⁴⁷ The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 5 in the appendix.

(46:2-4). Furthermore, he makes clear that, since they constitute the one body of Christ, the Corinthians' schisms are foolish (46:5-7) and bear dreadful consequences, for they have brought perversion, despair, doubt, sorrow and disgrace to the church (46:9; 47:5-6); have blasphemed God's name among unbelievers; have endangered the church (47:7); and, just as it has brought much sin (47:1-5), it will also bring judgement (46:8).

Since in chapters 44-45 Clement puts the Corinthians' rebellion against their blameless elders over against ancient examples of the righteous who were opposed by the unrighteous, the Corinthian elders, by implication, are included among the righteous in 1 Clement 45:7b-8. Consequently, this text serves a crucial function in Clement's argument in chapters 44-47⁴⁸: On the one hand it establishes that the deposed Corinthian elders are under God's care and protection, and that they will receive a great reward from him. And on the other hand it reveals that the Corinthians, rather than foolishly rebelling against their blameless elders (which is a major root problem of their schisms), should instead imitate their faithful example and cling to them, as explicitly stated in the following verses. The truths stated in 1 Clement 45:7b-8 are thus crucial for the restoration of unity in the Corinthian church.

3.3.1.2. *Verse-by-verse analysis*

Verse 7b-c: In the context of Christian suffering, which, in the past, included persecution, imprisonment, torture and execution (vv. 4, 7a), the latter part of verse 7 reveals who God is and what he does. The focus does not lie on the wicked persecutors, nor on the resultant suffering of certain believers, but on the fact that in the midst of this suffering God's greatness and omnipotence remain. The Father's name is stated to be excellent to the highest degree (πανάρετος; BDAG) and the title 'Most High' (ὑψιστος), which is repeated in verse 7 for emphasis, reveals that he possesses the highest status and authority (not the wicked persecutors, who may at times have appeared to have great authority). In addition, this wonderful and most high God cares for those who continuously⁴⁹ and blamelessly serve (or worship) him,

⁴⁸ At the same time 1 Clement 45:7b-8 also plays an important role in the epistle as a whole, for the entire letter revolves around the Corinthians' schisms.

⁴⁹ The present active participle 'λατρευόντων' points to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245).

for in the midst of their suffering he is stated to be their “champion and protector” (v. 7b). As their champion God fights on their behalf and defends them. The rare term 'ὑπέρμαχος' (champion) is usually employed in a context of danger and uncertainty, as is surely the case here in verse 7b (cf. 2 Macc 14:34; *Abr.* 232). And as their protector (ὑπερασπιστής), he watches over them and keeps them safe. In light of the fact that in the past certain believers were nevertheless killed (v. 4) it seems appropriate to understand God as “champion and protector” in that he, on the one hand, *frequently* (but not always) physically delivers the faithful suffering believers from harm (as was the case, for example, with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; vv. 6-7; Dan 3, 6) and that, on the other hand, he *always* protects them through afflictions, so that ultimately they can safely reach salvation in heaven. As a result of who God is and what he does in the midst of the believers' afflictions on account of their faith, Clement praises and honours him (v. 7c). In emphatically ascribing to God eternal (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων) glory, Clement implicitly invites his readers to join his praises.

Verse 8: While in verse 7b the initial subject was the wicked persecutors, verse 8 is, in stark contrast, about the faithful suffering believers of the past, who did not merely endure their afflictions at some point, but endured them continually⁵⁰ (thus, Holmes (2011:107) includes the adverb 'patiently') and with confidence (ἐν πεποιθήσει; which involves the element of trust in God; BDAG). In light of God's sovereignty noted in the previous verse this confidence and trust is absolutely appropriate. The remainder of the verse talks about the great reward which these faithful believers received for their persistent endurance. While in verse 7c Clement has attributed eternal glory to God, the faithful suffering believers of the past are now stated to likewise have obtained glory, as well as honour (v. 8a). Furthermore, they were lifted up (the passive verb 'ἐπήρθησάν' implies God as its agent; v. 8b) to heaven (BDAG) and their names were “recorded by God as their memorial” (μνημόσυον), which serves as a means to remember (L&N) their faithful service and endurance for all eternity (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων; v. 8c).

⁵⁰ The action of the present active participle 'ὑπομένοντες' is an ongoing one (Mounce 2009:245).

3.3.1.3. Conclusion

First Clement 45:7b-8 appears within the wider literary context of the Corinthian church's schisms, which were instigated by the deposing of some of its elders who were blameless according to Clement. The more immediate context, however, revolves around Clement's argument that in the Scriptures the righteous have never "been thrust out by holy men", but that persecution and suffering was brought about by the unrighteous (45:1-7a). In verses 7b-8, which must be understood in light of these previous verses, Clement makes several important points regarding the believers' suffering on account of their faith. In the midst of this gloomy context he does not focus on the wicked persecutors, nor on the afflictions some believers experienced at their hands, but on the sovereignty and excellence of God. In addition, this most high God actively aids the faithful persecuted believers in that he, as their champion and protector, defends them – by fighting on their behalf, and keeps them safe (often physically, but *always* spiritually). Finally, after Clement praises God (because of who he is and what he does in the midst of the believers' sufferings), he goes on to describe the great rewards of the suffering Christians of the past who faithfully endured: they received glory and honour, they were brought to heaven, and their faithful endurance is forever remembered.

3.3.2. Romans 5:1-3⁵¹

3.3.2.1. Literary context

Chapter 5, which is roughly located at the centre of the first eight chapters of the letter, is in several ways very similar to the rest of these seven chapters in that they share common repeated ideas. For instance, throughout the letter's first eight chapters Ignatius expresses his desire to die (a martyr's death), as well as to consequently be with God (1:2-2:2; 4:1; 5:2-6:3; 7:2-3). Other repeated themes are Ignatius' request of the Romans to grant him his martyrdom (2:2; 4:1; 5:3; 6:2-7:2; 8:1-3) and to pray for him (3:2; 4:2), as well as his notion of martyrdom proving that he is faithful (3:2; 4:1-2), even making him a better disciple (5:1, 3). The distinctive feature of chapter 5, however, is that it is by far the most graphic and brutal passage. It is in this chapter that Ignatius communicates to his readers that he welcomes even

⁵¹ The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 6 in the appendix.

the most horrendous scenarios in order to just reach Christ as soon as possible (v. 3).

In chapters 4-7 Ignatius builds his argument on the following structure: in chapter 4 he shares that one reason why he desires to be martyred is so that he can prove that he is “pure bread” (v. 1), a true disciple and “a sacrifice to God” (v. 3). In chapter 5 he then demonstrates that he really is ready to face his martyrdom – regardless of the gruesome elements that may be included in it. Naturally, in the following two chapters (chaps 6-7) Ignatius reveals the primary reason why he is ready for his martyrdom: he has an unquenchable desire not for the world or anything it could offer him, but for God and to be in his presence.

3.3.2.2. *Verse-by-verse analysis*

Verse 1: Ignatius states in the head proposition that he is engaged in an ongoing struggle (fighting with wild beasts). He puts special emphasis on the continuity of this struggle by noting that, while he is journeying from Syria to Rome, it occurs *all the time* (during⁵² night and day) and *everywhere* (on land and sea; v. 1a). Ignatius clarifies in verse 1b that he is not literally fighting with wild beasts, but figuratively, for the 'wild beasts' (which is merely included in the verb 'θηριομαχῶ' – “I am fighting with wild beasts”) refer to ten leopards, which in turn refer to a company of soldiers. By figuratively describing his struggle as fighting with wild beasts (instead of using a synonymous verb, such as 'ἀγωνίζομαι' (I fight, struggle), in a literal sense and including 'the soldiers' as the direct object), Ignatius compares the Roman soldiers to such beasts – pointing to their fierceness and cruelty, and thus emphasising the severe nature of his struggle with them.

In addition, Ignatius explains in verse 1b *how* he fights with them: he has been bound to them and, as their prisoner, they mistreat him. The perfect passive participle 'ἐνδεδεμένος' (having been bound) refers to a completed action (he was put in chains in Syria at the beginning of his journey to Rome) “that has consequences in the present” (Mounce 2009:276), that is, he is now vulnerable – completely at the

⁵² The preposition 'διὰ' can be used in a temporal sense, meaning 'throughout' or 'during' (Wallace 1996:369), as is the case here.

soldiers' mercy. The relative clause, which literally reads, 'who, while they are continuously⁵³ being treated well, even become worse' (i.e., harsher; BDAG), reveals two things. On the one hand the clause implies that Ignatius has been treating the soldiers kindly, and on the other hand the term 'even' (καὶ; translated by Holmes as 'only') emphasises their cruelty. It points to the fact that the soldiers had treated him badly from the beginning and when he in return treated them well, they treated him *even* worse. The severity of Ignatius' struggle is thus highlighted once more.

In verse 1c Ignatius presents a big contrast (δὲ; but), which reveals that he has a positive outlook in the midst of his dreadful circumstances. His focus does not lay on the unjust mistreatment of the soldiers, but on the fact that he is “becoming more of a disciple” because of it. The following proposition (v. 1d) clarifies that this ambiguous statement must not be interpreted in any meritorious terms – as if it had anything to do with his salvation. There he states that he has not been justified (οὐ...δεδικαίωμαι) by this (τοῦτο). It is clear from his letter to the Philadelphians that Ignatius views his justification as being based on Christ's death and resurrection, as well as on his faith in him (Ign. *Phld.* 8:2). Thus, neither his present suffering at the hands of the Roman soldiers, nor his good treatment of them in response, do in any way contribute to his justification (to his being found right and vindicated before God; BDAG), which has already taken place in the past (the perfect tense of the verb 'δεδικαίωμαι' refers to an action that has already been completed; Mounce 2009:223). Instead, the meaning of verse 1c appears to be that because of his struggles with the soldiers Ignatius all the more resembles a disciple of Christ (and thus he is found to be faithful), since such a one is characterised by suffering and opposition.

Verse 2: While in the previous verse Ignatius talked about how he is presently fighting with wild beasts figuratively, now he talks about fighting them literally in the near future, that is, once he reaches Rome. He reveals his readiness to be martyred and even graphically describes his strong desire to be devoured by the wild beasts in the arena. The magnitude of his longing for martyrdom is beautifully displayed in the verse structure, which reveals, in four steps, a progression from (1) a more general scenario to a very specific one, and (2) from wishful thinking to forceful action.

⁵³ The present passive participle 'εὐεργετούμενοι' refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245).

Regarding the former, Ignatius first writes about the pleasure he derives from the wild beasts in general terms (ὀνείμην τῶν θηρίων: “May I have the pleasure of the wild beasts”; that is, being in their presence in the arena; v. 2a). He then introduces the aspect of swiftness in a general sense (the adjective 'σύντομος' (prompt) is employed; v. 2b) and in the following clause, in which the swiftness remains emphasised (through the adverb 'συντόμως'), he introduces the element of being devoured (v. 2c). Finally, he adds to the picture his own initiative in the process of being devoured (v. 2f), which to a lesser degree is already seen in verse 2c. The action of forcing portrays and thus maintains the sense of rush that has been featured throughout the verse. Parallel to this development Ignatius also progressively moves from wishful thinking⁵⁴ (v. 2a) to prayer (v. 2b), to little physical action (enticing; v. 2c), and finally, to much (and forceful) physical action (v. 2f).

The structured progression in verse 2 emphatically establishes the point that Ignatius is ready to be martyred – ready even for the specifics involved in his martyrdom. In fact, he is determined to the point that he will even take the required action to ensure that he will successfully go through it – even going so far as to force the wild beasts to devour him, if they are unwilling to do so (v. 2e). His resolve to be martyred is further established by the repeated emphasis on swiftness (v. 2b, c, f), which displays the sense of impatience, as well as by the pleasure which Ignatius associates with the wild beasts (his use of the verb 'ὀνείμι' throughout his letters⁵⁵ reveals that the verb's occurrence here at the very beginning of verse 2 carries the connotation of enjoyment).

One more issue needs to be discussed here, namely, the meaning of the phrase “θηρίων τῶν ἐμοὶ ἡτοιμασμένων” (“wild beasts that have been prepared for me”; v. 2a). The passive voice of the participle naturally gives rise to the question: who does Ignatius consider to have prepared the wild beasts for him? The three obvious possibilities are God, the Romans, or both simultaneously. The fact that Ignatius is still relatively far away from Rome (he writes this letter from Smyrna; 10:1), as well as

⁵⁴ The verb 'ὀνείμην' (“may I have the pleasure”) is in the optative, which is the “mood of wish” (Mounce 2009:330).

⁵⁵ That is, in Ign. *Eph.* 2:2; Ign. *Magn.* 1; 12; Ign. *Pol.* 1:1; 6:2.

the use of the perfect participle 'ἠτοιμασμένων', which refers to an action that has (in the past) already been completed (Mounce 2009:276), seem to more naturally suggest God as the subject, rather than the Romans – as does the employed dative of advantage (ἐμοὶ: for me)⁵⁶. It thus seems that Ignatius regards his upcoming martyrdom to be part of God's plan for him.

Verse 3: While the first word of the verse (συγγνώμην) can refer to a concession, it can also refer to a pardon (BDAG). Thus, some translators render verse 3a as “Pardon me” (Schaff 2001:109) or “Forgive me” (Richardson 1995:105). However, the literary context suggests that Ignatius is here not asking for forgiveness, but rather for his request to be granted (i.e., the readers must allow him to be martyred; as expressed in 2:2; 4:1; 6:2-7:2 and 8:1-3). In addition, in verse 2 Ignatius has just revealed his longing for martyrdom. Thus, verse 3a (συγγνώμην μοι ἔχετε), which includes a dative of advantage (μοι: for me), is better translated as “Grant me this favour” (as rendered by Brannan 2011). In the following clause Ignatius provides for his readers one reason why they need to grant him his request: because, as he implies, his martyrdom will benefit him (literally: 'I know what is profitable (or good; useful) for me'; v. 3b). Once again, a dative of advantage (μοι: for me) is employed in order to underline the profitability of his martyrdom. In verse 3c Ignatius then explains one way how he regards his martyrdom to be profitable: through it he is “beginning to be a disciple”. This statement seems to be roughly synonymous to the phrase used earlier in verse 1c – “I am becoming more of a disciple”. That is, not only through his present suffering (the mistreatment of the soldiers; v. 1c) but also through his future suffering and death does Ignatius achieve a closer resemblance to a disciple of Christ, who, by following in his Lord's footsteps, is necessarily characterised by suffering and opposition – and at times even to the point of death. Holmes (2011:169) argues along these lines when he states that Ignatius becomes a true disciple through his imitation of the suffering of Jesus.

In verse 3d Ignatius wishes (the optative mood is employed) that nothing visible or invisible would envy him, that is, that nothing – neither persons nor spirits and powers

⁵⁶ Yet, even if Ignatius has the Romans in mind, it is likely that at the same time he considers the wild beasts to have been prepared for him by God as well.

in the physical or spiritual realm would envy his fate of being martyred and, as a result of this envy, prevent him somehow from obtaining his martyrdom. This is in line with his repeated request that his readers allow him to be martyred, which he has also just expressed earlier in this verse (v. 3a). The basis of this wish to be martyred is his ultimate desire to reach Jesus through his martyrdom (ἵνα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπιτύχω; 'that I may reach Jesus Christ'; v. 3e). This phrase is repeated for emphasis in the last clause of the verse (v. 3g) and thus reveals that to be with his Lord is Ignatius' greatest desire and goal (this conclusion is confirmed by his use of the emphatic term 'μόνον' (only) in verse 3g). His desire to be with Jesus then explains why he longs for his martyrdom so much⁵⁷ – even to the point where he longs for the various horrendous elements that are included in it, as expressed to some degree in the previous verse, but much more detailed now in verse 3f⁵⁸. The clause literally reads, 'Fire and cross and struggles with wild beasts, mutilations, tearings apart, scatterings of bones, cutting (to pieces) of limbs, grindings of the whole body, cruel tortures of the devil – let these come upon me'. The latter part of this clause not only describes in more detail what the “battles of wild beasts” look like, but it does so in a progressive manner, graphically describing the sequence of actions involved in a wild beast attacking and devouring a martyr in the arena. It is through these “cruel tortures of the devil” (the devil is ultimately behind these attacks, using the wild beasts as an instrument to torment and kill the martyr), which Ignatius is ready to endure, that he is able to go into Jesus' presence. This is another factor – and surely it is *the* main factor, that makes his martyrdom “profitable” (cf. v. 3b-c above).

In verses 2-3 Ignatius has expressed his longing to die a martyr's death in such a way that he is often regarded by scholars as having been suicidal or mentally ill (Moss 2012:55). Frend (1965:197), for instance, regards Ignatius' resolve as “bordering on mania”, and Cousar (2009:40) somewhat negatively refers to Ignatius' “passionate lust for martyrdom”. Yet, several factors (apart from the fact that he

⁵⁷ While it is Ignatius' ultimate goal of reaching Jesus that explains why he consequently also longs for his martyrdom in the arena, it is not the only reason for this longing. As we have seen earlier in verse 3c, another reason why Ignatius wants to be martyred is so that through it he can more fully resemble Jesus' disciples.

⁵⁸ Note that Ignatius' longing in verse 3f (“let these come upon me”) is expressed in the strongest possible manner – in that he uses the imperative (ἐρχέσθωσαν).

simply desired to be in Jesus' presence, which, as verse 3 clarifies, was certainly his main motivation) explain why he so greatly and expressively longed for his death. First, Ignatius, out of obedience (e.g., Mt 16:24-25), submission to his will (Ign. *Rom.* 5:2a) and love for him (7:2), desired to follow in Jesus' footsteps – even unto death (Ign. *Eph.* 10:3; Ign. *Trall.* 10; Ign. *Rom.* 6:3; 7:2; Ign. *Smyrn.* 4:2), as well as in the footsteps of Paul, whom he evidently admired greatly (Ign. *Eph.* 12:2). Second, as Aageson (2008, chap. 5) reasonably suggests, Ignatius, since he tried to follow in Paul's footsteps as closely as possible, probably also desired to attain, through his martyrdom, a status closer to Paul's own status, that is, to gain greater authority and influence through his death (however, not for his own sake but for the sake of the church). Third, Ignatius probably did not give himself up on his own initiative, simply wishing to die a martyr's death, but, as DeSilva (2004:755) notes, fell victim to persecution in Syria⁵⁹. Thus, having been sent on his way to Rome and knowing what was awaiting him there, he needed to fortify his courage (Lawson 2005:102), so that he would not shrink from his destiny when he arrives in the city (cf. Ign. *Rom.* 7:2), but bravely embrace it and endure it until the end. Fourth, as noted earlier in section 3.2.2.2., Ignatius needed to persuade the church in Rome to allow him to be martyred, lest their prayers and influence would have somehow brought about his freedom, and with it probably rumours that he must have apostatised. And fifth, his martyrdom provided the ultimate proof of his faithfulness (that he has become a true disciple). Such a validation seems to have been important in light of the probability that the Syrian church “was on the verge of splitting”, which, as its former bishop, would have reflected badly on him (Holmes 2011:169). Taking all of these factors into consideration, it becomes clear that Ignatius' anticipation for his martyrdom was thoroughly reasonable.

3.3.2.3. Conclusion

In Romans 5:1-3 Ignatius expresses his passionate desire to be martyred and reveals that he is indeed ready for his death – ready enough to anticipate even the gruesome tortures that will be involved in it (v. 3f), and ready enough to take forceful

⁵⁹ Ehrman (1997:374) reasonably proposes that “those who preceded” Ignatius “from Syria to Rome” (Ign. *Rom.* 10:2) were other persecuted believers of the Syrian church who were arrested and sent to Rome before him.

action in order to obtain it, if that will be necessary (v. 2). He explains that his martyrdom will be profitable for him (v. 3b-c), just as his ongoing present suffering at the hands of the Roman soldiers has already proven to be advantageous (v. 1c). Ignatius demonstrates both, his resolve to die, as well as the profitability of his suffering and death, with the purpose to persuade his readers to allow him to be martyred (v. 3a). They must not prevent his martyrdom – neither by praying for his release, nor by using the church's influence to secure for him lenient treatment from the Roman authorities. Nothing visible or invisible must prevent him from obtaining his anticipated execution in the arena (v. 3d-e). Ignatius notes two reasons why he wants to be martyred so badly: first and foremost, he longs to be with Christ (v. 3e, g). Thus, his great desire for martyrdom is based on his even greater desire for Christ's presence. And second, he regards his suffering and death as making him become a true disciple (vv. 1c, 3c; thus showing him to be faithful), in that through these he more closely resembles a disciple of Christ, who is necessarily characterised by hardship and opposition (which, according to Ignatius, optimally also includes death). He clarifies, however, that his “becoming more of a disciple” must not be understood in any meritorious terms (v. 1c-d), for his justification is neither based on his suffering, nor on his actions in the midst of such suffering, but on Christ's death and resurrection, as well as his faith in him. In addition, Ignatius also desires to be martyred in order to obediently follow in Christ's footsteps, as well as in those of Paul, and to prevent any rumours of his apostatising, which would likely spread if he were to be unexpectedly released. Considering these different factors, Ignatius' passionate resolve to die in the arena is far from unreasonable. His faith and commitment to Christ in the midst of severe hardship are greatly commendable.

3.3.3. Smyrnaeans 4:2⁶⁰

3.3.3.1. Literary context

The first half of the letter revolves around the threat of the docetic false teachers and the truths they deny (chaps 1-7). Smyrnaeans 4:2 is located in the centre of this discussion. In the first three chapters Ignatius affirms that Jesus was born, lived, died and resurrected in the flesh. In the more immediate literary context Ignatius warns his

⁶⁰ The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 7 in the appendix.

readers concerning the false teachers, who deny these truths, and provides practical instructions in how they must deal with them: they must neither welcome nor meet them, but they must nevertheless pray for them (4:1). The first two sentences of verse 2 establish a smooth transition from Ignatius' dealings with the docetic false teachers and their heresies to his own experience of suffering, which is then followed by a short teaching on suffering (v. 2d-i). In the subsequent chapter 5 Ignatius discloses the true nature of those who deny that Jesus had a physical body: they are unbelievers – ignorant “advocates of death”, who blaspheme and deny Christ. In chapters 6-7 he then exhorts his readers not to be misled but rather to avoid such heretics.

Smyrnaeans 4:2 is the only “extended” text in the letter in which Ignatius writes about his own experience of suffering. At first sight it seems that this verse is somewhat unrelated to the remainder of chapters 1-7 and thus disrupts Ignatius' argument. However, in this verse he is not merely informing his readers about his current situation and explaining to them how he interprets his struggles, but at the same time he uses the verse to strengthen his argument in chapters 1-7. He uses his own experience, which in itself no one can refute, in order to further reinforce the fact that Jesus really suffered in the flesh. By comparing his own suffering (which is obviously very real and endured by him in the flesh; v. 2b-c) to that of Jesus, he implies that Jesus likewise suffered and died in the flesh. Furthermore, Ignatius implies that a true disciple suffers because the Master himself has truly suffered (v. 2d-e); writes of his present suffering together with Jesus (v. 2g), which points to the fact that Jesus truly suffered in his life; and emphasises that Jesus is the perfect *human* being (v. 2i).

3.3.3.2. Verse analysis

Ignatius presents his readers with a hypothetical scenario: if Jesus had suffered and died in appearance only (rather than in the flesh; v. 2a), then Ignatius also has been bound in appearance only (v. 2b). Verse 2b is clearly just hypothetical, for Ignatius is fully aware of the realness of his present physical suffering, as is clear, for instance, from his previously written letter to the Romans⁶¹ (e.g., 5:1). Ignatius therefore

⁶¹ That Ignatius wrote Romans shortly prior to Smyrnaeans is clear from the fact that, having been on his way from Syria to Rome, the former was written from Smyrna (Ign. *Rom.* 10:1) and the latter

implies that since his physical suffering is very real, Jesus likewise truly suffered and died in the flesh. His question in verse 2c makes the same point, as it implies that his willingness to physically suffer only makes sense if Jesus had done so before him. It is only because Jesus truly suffered and died in the flesh that Ignatius also has given himself up to severe suffering (fire, sword and wild beasts) and death. Schoedel (1985:231) reaches the same conclusion, noting that docetism “makes nonsense of Ignatius' martyrdom”. Thus, in verse 2a-c Ignatius refutes the docetic notion that Jesus suffered and died in appearance only. In addition, he reveals that in his suffering and anticipated death in the arena he is in fact following in Jesus' footsteps.

In verse 2d-e Ignatius presents the answer to his question (why he has given himself up to suffering and death): because someone who is “near to God” and “with God” (i.e., a disciple) is at the same time also “near the sword” and “with the beasts”. In other words, a disciple is naturally characterised by suffering and opposition, and that is the reason why Ignatius now suffers and will die in the near future. For Ignatius, suffering and walking faithfully with God go hand in hand⁶². In the midst of his struggles he finds consolation in the fact that he is exactly where he wants to be – near to God.

The surrounding clauses of verse 2f indicate that the statement “Only let it be in the name of Jesus Christ” likewise revolves around Ignatius' suffering. BDAG clarifies that in early Christian literature the phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ” (or of God) in most instances means “with mention of the name, while naming or calling on the name”. I agree with the lexicon's authors that verse 2f is best understood in this sense as well, so that the clause could be rendered, 'Only let my suffering be while I call on the name of Jesus Christ'. This interpretation finds support in the following

from Troas (Ign. *Smyrn.* 12:1).

⁶² Schoedel (1985:231-232) interprets verse 2d-e differently: he holds that Ignatius considers here the ultimate outcome of enduring his suffering, that his upcoming martyrdom (“near the sword” and “with the beasts”) is the means through which he can be with God. Verse 2d makes sense when interpreted in this way, since when Ignatius is “near the sword” (about to die) he is naturally near to God in that he will in a short moment be with him in heaven. However, I see the difficulty of Schoedel's interpretation laying in verse 2e, for “with the beasts” does *not* mean “with God” (it rather means that he will *soon* be with God).

clause (v. 2g), in which Ignatius reveals the purpose⁶³ of his calling on Jesus in the midst of his suffering: in order that he would not have to suffer alone, but “together with him” (with Christ; from συμπράσχω: I suffer (together) with).

The last two clauses of the verse literally read, 'I endure everything, while he, who is the perfect human being, is continuously⁶⁴ empowering me.' Although the last clause lacks a term such as 'ὅτι', 'διό', or 'ἐπεί' (because), it is nevertheless clear that the clause presents the reason why Ignatius is able to endure all of his struggles: because Christ continually empowers him to do so. Ignatius has emphasised Christ's power in the end of verse 1 and here at the end of verse 2 this power resurfaces in the context of Ignatius' suffering. The verb 'ἐνδυναμόω' (I empower) does not occur elsewhere in the Apostolic Fathers' writings, and only appears thrice in the New Testament (Phil 4:13; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 4:17). These three occurrences reveal, however, that the verb carries a connotation of strengthening, as is certainly also the case here in verse 2i. So, Ignatius is able to be faithful (in endurance) because Jesus is constantly faithful to him in that he strengthens him. Finally, while Ignatius has, in this verse, repeatedly pointed to the reality of Jesus' suffering in the flesh – through a series of implications (see the end of section 3.3.3.1.), he now ends his short teaching on suffering with the fact that Jesus, who strengthens him, is the perfect (τέλειος; or complete) human being. He once more emphasises that Jesus was, and in fact *still is*, perfectly and completely human⁶⁵, thus reinforcing his argument in chapters 1-7 against the docetic heresies.

3.3.3.3. Conclusion

In Smyrnaeans 4:2, which appears in the centre of his argument against docetism (chaps 1-7), Ignatius repeatedly implies that Jesus did not suffer and die in appearance only, but that he truly did so in the flesh (v. 2a-c, d-e, g) – and that is why, in fact, Ignatius now suffers too (v. 2b-c). In addition, Ignatius also underlines the perfect and complete humanity of Jesus by calling him the “perfect human being” (v.

⁶³ The preposition 'εἰς', followed by the articular infinitive ('τὸ συμπαθεῖν'), indicates purpose (Mounce 2009:304).

⁶⁴ The present participle 'ἐνδυναμοῦντος' refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245).

⁶⁵ While Jesus, of course, was and still is perfectly and completely God as well (Ign. *Smyrn.* 1:1).

2i). So, Ignatius uses his own irrefutable experience of suffering in this verse in order to strengthen his argument against the docetic heresies.

At the same time Ignatius presents to his readers a short teaching on suffering (v. 2d-i). This appears in the context of his own hardships, including his upcoming death. He establishes three major points: first, a disciple is characterised by suffering and opposition, since such a one is following in his Master's footsteps. Therefore, the struggling believer may take comfort in the fact that in his suffering he is "near to God" and "with God" (v. 2d-e). Second, a suffering believer ought to call out to Jesus, so that he may not suffer alone but together with his Lord (v. 2f-g). And third, Ignatius notes that he is able to endure everything because Jesus continuously empowers and strengthens him (v. 2h-i).

3.3.4. Philippians 8:2-9:2⁶⁶

3.3.4.1. Literary context

The entire epistle revolves around Polycarp's exhortation of the Philippians to live righteously. He repeatedly asks them to follow God's commandments (Pol. *Phil* 2:2; 4:1; 5:1; 6:3; 9:1). By providing specific instructions Polycarp clarifies to his readers throughout the letter what such righteous living looks like (e.g., 2:2-3; 4:2-3; 5:2-6:1; 10:1). The immediate literary context of Philippians 8:2-9:2 revolves around Christ: in Philippians 8:1 Polycarp establishes that Christ, who was without sin, endured the suffering on the cross for the sake of the believers, and that he is, therefore, the "guarantee of our righteousness". In 8:2-9:2 Polycarp urges his readers to imitate Christ's patient endurance, as well as that of Ignatius, Zosimus, Rufus, Paul and others. In chapter 10 he then once more exhorts his readers to follow Christ's example. This time, however, Polycarp does not refer to Jesus' patient endurance in particular, but rather to his righteous way of living in general.

So, Philippians 8:2-9:2 presents one specific application of living righteously, namely, enduring patiently the hardships which the Philippians experience (i.e., persecution and hatred from others; 12:3). The fact that Polycarp's exhortation in 8:2-9:2 appears in the context of Christ's own righteous conduct serves as a tool of persuasion:

⁶⁶ The text and its structure of argument are displayed in table 8 in the appendix.

because Jesus' righteous and self-sacrificial life and death were *for* the Philippians, they must now, as a response of gratitude, walk in his footsteps.

3.3.4.2. Verse-by-verse analysis

Philippians 8:2: Having just written in verse 1 about Christ's own endurance of his sufferings for the sake of the believers, Polycarp now exhorts the Philippians to become imitators of this endurance⁶⁷ (v. 2a) and thus to follow the example that Christ has set for them (v. 2d). The term 'therefore' (οὖν) reveals that verse 2a is an inference based on the previous verse: the Philippians must imitate Christ's patient endurance out of gratitude for what he has graciously endured for them, for it is only through Christ's endurance of the cross that the Philippians are now saved (v. 1). However, if the Philippians suffer because of their commitment to Jesus (literally: on account of his name; διὰ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ; v. 2b), which they certainly do, as is evident from 12:3, they must not only endure their suffering, but also continuously glorify⁶⁸ (or praise, honour; BDAG) him in it (v. 2c). The reason why they must glorify Jesus in their suffering is noted in the following clause (v. 2d): because if they suffer on account of him they are in fact following his example (ὑπογραμμός; or model of behaviour; L&N), which they have been called to follow. And this is not a new teaching, but a notion they have already believed to be true in the past (v. 2e).

Philippians 9:1: The term 'therefore' (οὖν) indicates that verse 1a-b is an inference drawn from the latter part of the previous verse: it is because Jesus has set an example of patient endurance for the believers to follow (8:2d) that Polycarp now once again urges the Philippians to patiently endure their suffering (9:1a-b)⁶⁹. While Polycarp has in the previous verse (8:2a) employed the hortatory subjunctive ('let us...') to exhort his readers to become imitators of Jesus' endurance, he now makes

⁶⁷ The employed verb 'γενώμεθα' is a hortatory subjunctive (Mounce 2009:294) and is thus best translated as 'let us become'.

⁶⁸ The present subjunctive 'δοξάζωμεν' refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:289). In addition, δοξάζωμεν is another *hortatory* subjunctive and should thus be translated as 'let us glorify'.

⁶⁹ Thus, the overall structure of Philippians 8:2b-9:1b is, as Schreiner (2011:107) would call it, bilateral: the bilateral proposition of Philippians 8:2d presents the reason for the preceding propositions (8:2b-c) and at the same time an inference is drawn from it in the subsequent propositions (9:1a-b). Through this structure Polycarp puts emphasis on the bilateral proposition – the fact that Jesus has set an example of patient endurance for the believers to follow (8:2d).

the same point, but with greater force: he strongly urges (BDAG; from παρακαλέω) his readers to do so (9:1a).

The latter part of 9:1a ('to obey the word of righteousness'; πειθαρχεῖν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς δικαιοσύνης) and the proposition of 9:1b ('to practice all endurance'; ἀσκεῖν πᾶσαν ὑπομονήν) are not two separate ideas but belong together: to obey the word of righteousness *is* to practice all endurance. The former phrase thus reveals that the Philippians must not merely imitate Christ's patient endurance based on a natural desire to follow their Master's example (i.e., out of gratitude; see above on 8:2), but also out of obedience – because such endurance has been commanded by God in his word. Just as the phrase 'λόγου δικαιοσύνης' (the word of righteousness) in Hebrews 5:13 refers to God's word (Cockerill 2012:258), so the phrase 'τῷ λόγῳ τῆς δικαιοσύνης' (the word of righteousness) here in Philippians 9:1a refers to what God has spoken through the Scriptures. In these he speaks that believers must practice *all* (πᾶσαν) endurance (9:1b), or, as Holmes (2011:291) renders it, “exercise *unlimited* endurance” (italics mine).

In the remainder of the verse (9:1c-f) Polycarp provides further examples for his readers to follow. While probably none of his readers has personally witnessed how Jesus endured the cross, they have seen with their own eyes how Ignatius, Zosimus, Rufus, Paul and the other apostles, as well as certain individuals in the Philippian church have patiently endured tribulation. These faithful examples must, by implication, be followed by the Philippians.

Philippians 9:2: While the Philippians saw how Ignatius, Zosimus, Rufus, Paul and the rest patiently endured their suffering (9:1c-f), they have also been assured (the perfect passive participle 'πεπεισμένους' refers to a completed action; Mounce 2009:276) that these role models, who were characterised by faith and righteousness (9:2b), “did not run in vain” (9:2a) and that they are in their due place in the presence of (παρὰ) Christ (9:2c). So, the Philippians are already aware that the labour and endurance of these faithful individuals were, and still are, greatly rewarded in

heaven⁷⁰.

Furthermore, these role models are stated to have suffered with Christ (9:2d) because of their love for him (9:2f). They were willing to suffer with him because they loved him, rather than the present world (literally: the present age) and what it has to offer (9:2e-f). Another motivating factor for their endurance of suffering, which is clearly implied in this text, is their gratitude for what Christ has done for them: he died on their behalf (9:2f) and thus he was also raised by the Father for their sake (9:2g).

While this verse talks about the role models mentioned in the previous verse, its truths are also to be applied by the Philippians. On the one hand they must imitate these role models and endure their own suffering on account of Christ (i.e., suffer with him) out of gratitude⁷¹ and love for him. And on the other hand they can be hopeful in the midst of this suffering, knowing that their endurance will likewise be rewarded in heaven. Fitzgerald (2006:8) makes a helpful contribution on this verse, noting that in fact endurance then, since it brings an eternal reward, is a “blessing received from Christ”.

3.3.4.3. *Conclusion*

Throughout his letter to the Philippians Polycarp exhorts his readers to live righteously. One major component of such virtuous living, which Polycarp emphasises, is the patient endurance of suffering (13:2b). In Philippians 8:2-9:2 he urges his readers, who experience hardship (12:3), to follow Jesus' example of patient endurance, as well as the examples of Ignatius, Zosimus, Rufus, Paul and others. The primary reason why they must not only endure their suffering (9:1a-b) but even glorify Jesus in it (8:2b-c) is the fact that in his suffering and endurance of it Jesus has set an example for them to follow (8:2d), and it is therefore in their patient endurance of their own trials that they successfully imitate their Master and walk according to their calling. Because it has been commanded in God's word endurance

⁷⁰ It should be noted that although Ignatius was still alive at the time of Polycarp's writing, he was seemingly on the verge of his execution (see 13:2). It is probably because Polycarp expects Ignatius' death to occur shortly that he includes him in this list of faithful individuals (9:1c-f) who are already with Christ (9:2c).

⁷¹ This idea has already been explicitly expressed in Philippians 8:2b-9:1a.

is a matter of obedience (9:1a), which must be motivated by the Philippians' gratitude for what Christ has graciously endured for them (8:1b-2a; 9:2f-g), as well as by their love for him (9:2f). Yet another motivating factor for their endurance is hope – as they can rest assured that they will receive an eternal reward (i.e., to be in Christ's presence), just as the faithful martyrs of Philippians 9:1 have already received it (9:2a-c). Consequently, the endurance of persecution and hatred (12:3), which they experience because of their commitment to Jesus, is not merely the Philippians' duty, but, since it brings an eternal reward, is a blessing from God for which the Philippians can be thankful for.

3.4. Survey of other relevant texts on suffering in the Apostolic Fathers⁷²

3.4.1. Suffering on account of Christ

When writing about suffering Polycarp and especially Ignatius frequently specify that the experienced suffering occurs on account of Christ. Ignatius repeatedly notes that he is bound for Jesus' sake (*Eph.* 1:2; 3:1; 11:2; *Trall.* 12:2a; *Phld.* 5:1; 7:2). In these verses the prepositions 'ὕπὲρ', 'ἐν' (4x) and 'ἕνεκεν' are employed to convey the idea of 'on account of/for the sake of' – Holmes (2011) translates each of these prepositions, with exception to the 'ἐν' in Ephesians 11:2, as 'for the sake of'. Likewise, in Romans 1:1 Ignatius notes that he has been bound ἐν Χριστῷ – that is, *because of Christ*⁷³. In Ephesians 12:2a Ignatius writes about “those who are being killed for God's sake” (i.e., the martyrs) and in Romans 6:1 describes his own imminent death as being 'on account of' (διὰ) Christ. Polycarp states that “those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake” (ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης; i.e., because of their commitment to Christ) are blessed (*Phil* 2:3b) and writes, as it has been shown earlier in the exegetical analysis of the verse, that when he and his readers “suffer for

⁷² The other passages that will be considered in this survey are 1 Clement 5:2-7; 6:1-2; 15:6-7; 22:7-8; 45:3-7a; 55:1-2; Ephesians salutation; 1:2; 3:1; 10:3; 11:2; 12:2; Magnesians 1:3; 5:2; 8:2; 9:1; Trallians 4:2; 5:2; 10:1; 12:2-3; Romans 1:1-2; 2:1-2; 3:2-3; 4:1-3; 6:1-3; 7:2; 8:3; Philadelphians 5:1; 7:2; Smyrnaeans 5:1; 9:2; 10:2; 11:1; Ignatius' letter to Polycarp 2:3; 3:1; 7:1 and Philippians 1:1 and 2:3.

⁷³ Wallace (1996:372) lists ten basic uses of the preposition 'ἐν'. In Romans 1:1, however, only the causal use of ἐν makes sense and is thus best translated as 'because of Christ'.

the sake of his name” (διᾱ; i.e., the name of Christ), they must glorify him (*Phil* 8:2). Furthermore, Ignatius notes that the Smyrnaeans “endure everything for his sake” (διᾱ; i.e., for God's sake; *Smyrn.* 9:2b). The point is that Ignatius and Polycarp, when writing about the believer's suffering, usually have in mind his suffering on account of Christ – or, in other words, because of his commitment to him. This is not the case in Clement's epistle: he never explicitly refers to suffering as occurring on account of Christ (in 1 Clement 5:2-6:2 and 45:3-7a this idea is implied).

3.4.2. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life and thus a demonstration of his Christianity

In Ignatius' understanding it is when Christianity is hated by the world that it is truly great (*Rom.* 3:3b; for the essence of Christianity contradicts worldly standards). Because true Christianity is opposed and persecuted by the world, so the individual believer is naturally characterised by such opposition and persecution as well: Ignatius holds that a person is not a believer unless he voluntarily chooses to die into the suffering of Christ (*Magn.* 5:2b). In other words, a believer must necessarily be characterised by the same kind of suffering as Jesus experienced (because he is an imitator of his Master's suffering; *Eph.* 10:3; *Rom.* 6:3a). Polycarp agrees with this notion, stating that chains are therefore fitting for the saints (τοῖς ἁγιοπρεπέσιν δεσμοῖς; *Pol. Phil* 1:1), and Ignatius naturally regards his chains as venerable – being fit for God or worthy of him (θεοπρεπεστάτοις; BDAG; *Smyrn.* 11:1a).

Clement notes that the righteous (i.e., the believer) has many afflictions (*1 Clem.* 22:7) and he demonstrates how believers have been persecuted, tortured and killed by unbelievers in the past (45:3-7a). The notion that the believer is characterised by suffering *due to his commitment to Christ* is illustrated in Ignatius' letter to the Magnesians: the godly prophets were persecuted for the very reason that they “lived in accordance with Christ Jesus” (8:2a). Consequently, it is when the believer suffers (as Jesus did) at the hands of unbelievers (*1 Clem.* 45:3-7a) and patiently endures this suffering that he is found to be a disciple of Christ (*Magn.* 9:1b).

Ignatius applies this principle in his own life: his letter to the Romans (3:2) reveals that this principle is one reason why he is willing (and even desires) to be martyred, rather than to be released from Roman custody – so that he can be found a Christian

(Χριστιανὸς...εὐρεθῶ). In his letter to Polycarp (7:1b) he states that the purpose⁷⁴ of his suffering and death is to be found a disciple. Holmes (2011:229, 269) appropriately translates both phrases with the verb 'prove', rendering the phrase in Romans 3:2 as “prove to be one” (a Christian), and the phrase in Polycarp 7:1 as “prove to be a disciple”. For Ignatius to suffer as Jesus suffered (through persecution, ridicule, hatred, etc.) serves as an evidence of one's Christianity. This idea is also found in Romans 2:1b, where Ignatius expresses his desire to be a 'word of God' (λόγος θεοῦ), rather than merely a voice (φωνή). Schoedel (1985:171) clarifies that for Ignatius to be a word of God refers to him being able, through his martyrdom, to authenticate his claim (the φωνή) of being a Christian.

By successfully going through his martyrdom, in addition to proving that he truly is a believer, he also proves that he is faithful (to his Lord; *Rom.* 3:2) – that he is, figuratively speaking, a “pure bread” (4:1b). Holmes (2011:169-170) sheds light on a possible reason why Ignatius was concerned about demonstrating his faithfulness: the Syrian church experienced some troubling conflict and disorder (cf. *Smyrn.* 11:2-3), and Ignatius, as its bishop, may have felt responsible, thus deeming it necessary “to redeem his reputation as a bishop and a Christian”.

3.4.3. Martyrdom as the way to true discipleship

Ignatius takes a step further from arguing that a disciple is characterised by suffering to revealing that true discipleship is attained through martyrdom. Ignatius notes that in fact he is not yet a disciple (*Trall.* 5:2b), that he is now “only beginning to be a disciple” (*Eph.* 3:1), that the purpose (the term ἵνα' is employed) of his fighting with wild beasts in the Roman arena is that he would “be able to be a disciple” (1:2) and that once he is eaten by the wild beasts he “will truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ” (*Rom.* 4:2). Ivan (2013:175) rightly acknowledges that in these verses Ignatius does not promote the idea that martyrdom offers salvation (cf. *Rom.* 5:1b). He further argues that according to Ignatius martyrdom does, nevertheless, grant the believer a privileged status. While this may seem like a plausible interpretation, in light of Ignatius' commendable humility (e.g., *Eph.* 21:2; *Rom.* 9:2; *Smyrn.* 11:1) I do not

⁷⁴ The preposition 'εἰς', followed by the articular infinitive ('τὸ εὐρεθῆναι'), indicates purpose (Mounce 2009:304).

believe, however, that in these verses Ignatius is concerned about attaining a special status, but that these verses reflect his understanding of what true discipleship looks like⁷⁵.

For Ignatius a true disciple is one who completely imitates his Master (*Eph.* 10:3) and who is thus characterised by suffering – preferably even to the point where he pays the ultimate price for his commitment to Christ, that is, dying a martyr's death (Ivan (2013:178) agrees with this assessment). Thus, through his martyrdom Ignatius can become a true disciple (like Paul and the other apostles who died for Christ). Because he has not yet reached the ultimate goal of a disciple, which is, according to Ignatius, to die a martyr's death (Lawson 2005:108), he humbly refers to himself as merely beginning to be a disciple (*Eph.* 3:1). I have earlier established (see section 3.3.2.3.) that Ignatius' "beginning to be a disciple" (*Rom.* 5:3c) and his "becoming more of a disciple" (5:1c) through his suffering refer to his increasing resemblance of a disciple, who is characterised by suffering and opposition. Yet, the suffering and martyrdom of Ignatius mean more to him than simply an increase in this resemblance: through his suffering and martyrdom he is actually becoming a true disciple⁷⁶.

Haykin (2007:37) rightly points out that Ignatius nowhere exhorts his readers to follow his example of being martyred. Thus, while Ignatius holds that a believer must *necessarily* be characterised by suffering (in whatever way and to whatever extent that may be), he merely regards the believer's death through martyrdom as a *preferable* option – or an ideal scenario (see the following section), rather than as an absolutely necessary and unavoidable destiny. Because Ignatius desires to be martyred for a variety of reasons and in order to fortify his courage (see end of section 3.3.2.3.), he portrays martyrdom as the absolutely necessary path *for himself*.

⁷⁵ I hold this conclusion tentatively, for while Ignatius is certainly humble and probably not concerned much about gaining a special status, it is also true that he desires to demonstrate, in some instances (e.g., *Rom.* 3:2), that he is not a failure but faithful and on the right track in his walk with God (see the end of the previous section).

⁷⁶ Note that Ignatius' ideas of him not yet being a disciple and of him just beginning to be a disciple are certainly also expressions of his great humility (cf. *Eph.* 21:2; *Rom.* 9:2; *Smyrn.* 11:1).

3.4.4. Death as a preferable option

Ignatius repeatedly expresses his passionate desire to die a martyr's death in the Roman arena. In his letter to the Trallians (4:2a) he explains that he indeed loves to suffer (ἀγαπῶ μὲν γὰρ τὸ παθεῖν; 'to suffer' is a reference to martyrdom; see footnote in section 3.4.8.) and that he continuously⁷⁷ prays that he would reach God (i.e., to die and be with him; 12:2a). Similarly, he writes to the Romans (7:2) that he continuously⁷⁸ strongly desires to die (ἐρῶν τοῦ ἀποθανεῖν). He further expresses this desire to die in Romans 1:1-2:2; 4:1-2; 6:1-3 and 8:3, as well as in Smyrnaeans 11:1b. However, despite his strong desire to die Ignatius ultimately submits to God's plan for him: he writes that he hopes to greet the Romans (i.e., on the way to his martyrdom), *if* it is God's will for him to reach that goal (*Rom.* 1:1b).

The different reasons why Ignatius expresses his longing to die in the arena have already been enumerated (see the last paragraph of section 3.3.2.3.). By repeatedly and thus emphatically establishing his positive attitude towards martyrdom Ignatius in fact indirectly argues that for the believer death (especially a martyr's death) is not a tragic event but a preferable option⁷⁹, and thus fortifies the courage of other persecuted believers.

3.4.5. Suffering as an evidence of Christ's humanity

In Trallians 10:1 Ignatius, arguing against docetism, asks his readers why he presently suffers and why he desires to be martyred if it were true, as the docetists teach, that Jesus “suffered in appearance only”. His point is that if Jesus did not suffer in the flesh, then it makes no sense for him to suffer (literally: I die without purpose; δωρεὰν...ἀποθνήσκω), but if Jesus did truly suffer, then it makes sense for Ignatius, who is an imitator of Jesus (*Eph.* 10:3; *Rom.* 6:3a), to suffer as well. Therefore, the fact that Ignatius does truly suffer and is ready to be martyred serves as evidence of Christ's true suffering and thus as an evidence of his humanity.

⁷⁷ The present participle 'αἰτούμενος' refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245).

⁷⁸ The present participle 'ἐρῶν' refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245).

⁷⁹ The fact that for Ignatius death is not merely a *good* option for the believer but a *preferable* option is clear especially in light of Ignatius' view that martyrdom is in general the way to true discipleship (see the previous section).

Ignatius establishes this same point in a very similar fashion in Smyrnaeans 4:2a (see section 3.3.3.3.), as well as in Smyrnaeans 5:1 – although somewhat differently: he notes that neither the prophecies, the law of Moses, the gospel nor his and the Smyrnaeans' own individual suffering have persuaded those people who deny Christ and who are “advocates of death rather than of the truth”. That 'the truth' refers specifically to Christ's *physical* suffering and that 'these people' is a reference to the docetists is clear from the following verse (v. 2). Ignatius therefore implies that the believer's suffering is one means, among others, through which Christ's humanity is manifested to the unbelievers. In other words, the believer's suffering on account of Christ serves as an evidence of Christ's humanity. Schoedel (1985:234) proposes the same interpretation, stating that each of the four components in verse 1b confirms “the reality of Christ's humanity”.

3.4.6. Suffering for the benefit of others

Ignatius notes twice that his chains (or his being bound) are a ransom (ἀντίψυχον) on behalf of his readers (*Smyrn.* 10:2a; *Pol.* 2:3b). In addition, he writes that he is a ransom (ἀντίψυχον) on behalf of his readers (*Eph.* 21:1a), as well as of those who are obedient to the church leadership (*Pol.* 6:1). I agree with Kirk's (2013:87) assessment that Ignatius does not view his suffering and death as possessing any atoning quality (as with Jesus' death), but rather as displaying his devotion and thus also his good will towards his readers. Note that Holmes (2011:201) translates the phrase Ἀντίψυχον ὑμῶν ἐγὼ' (literally: 'I am a ransom on your behalf') in Ephesians 21:1a as “I am devoted to you”. Kirk (2013:88) points out that it is possible that Ignatius viewed his sacrificial suffering and death as representing Jesus' sacrifice for his readers, thus giving them a glimpse of what Jesus did for them, and, in addition, that Ignatius aims at leaving his readers an example they can follow. Whatever exact meaning the phrase Ἀντίψυχον ὑμῶν ἐγὼ' entails, it appears that according to Ignatius his suffering and death are in some way for his readers, that is, they gain some kind of benefit through it. While this benefit seems to include some of the above-mentioned components (suffering as (1) a proof of Ignatius' devotion, (2) a representation of Jesus' sacrifice and (3) an example to be imitated) it maybe includes other components as well.

Clement of Rome, in his endeavour to persuade those of his readers who are guilty of having caused schism in the church to humbly submit to it (and to God) for the common good (*1 Clem.* 54:2; 56:1a), recounts examples from the past how certain persons have submitted themselves to sacrificial suffering (and, at times, even to death) in order to benefit others⁸⁰: during times of pestilence kings and rulers have handed themselves over to death in order to rescue, through their blood (i.e., to ransom), their subjects (55:1). In addition, many have given themselves over to imprisonment so that they would ransom (or redeem; from λυτρόω) others (v. 2a), and many have handed themselves over to slavery so that they could feed others with the received price (v. 2b). The common repeated idea is the person's willingness to suffer sacrificially (the verb 'παραδίδωμι' (I hand over) appears three times) and through this suffering to ransom others – or to benefit others by allowing them to stay alive, free or fed. Thus, according to Clement it is possible for the believer (and people in general) to suffer for the physical benefit of others.

3.4.7. Suffering as a blessing to the church

In the salutation to the Ephesians it becomes clear that according to Ignatius the Ephesian church's suffering is not some tragedy, but indeed a blessing, for the church is stated to have been “united and elect through genuine suffering”. According to Ignatius a true disciple must necessarily be characterised by suffering, since he is following in his Master's footsteps (see section 3.4.2.). It therefore comes as no surprise that he considers the believer's suffering as the *means* (here the preposition 'έν' is used in an instrumental sense and can thus be translated as 'by' or 'through'; see Wallace 1996:372) – and thus as a prerequisite – of his election. Because the Ephesian church's common suffering is the means by which it has in the past⁸¹ obtained the blessings of election and unity, the suffering itself becomes a blessing (and indeed even a necessity). And because ultimately the believer's suffering is both a blessing and a necessity, it is “the will of the Father and of Jesus” that the believer suffers on account of his faith (*Eph.* salutation).

⁸⁰ While Clement merely clarifies that these are examples of Gentiles (*1 Clem.* 55:1a), it is likely that at least some (if not many) of them were believers.

⁸¹ The perfect participles 'ήνωμένη' ('has been united') and 'έκλεγμένη' ('has been chosen') refer to a completed action (in the past) with present consequences (Mounce 2009:276).

3.4.8. Suffering and martyrdom as a privilege

Ignatius reveals that martyrdom is a privilege, since it requires one to be worthy of it: Ignatius tells his readers that he does not know whether he is worthy (ἄξιός) to suffer (*Trall.* 4:2a) and whether Jesus wills that he is considered worthy (from ἀξιόω: I consider worthy) “to reach the goal” (*Rom.* 1:1b). He also asks his readers to pray for him – that he would be considered worthy (from καταξιόω: I consider worthy) of the lot (or fate; κλήρος) he so desires (*Trall.* 12:3b). Furthermore, Ignatius writes about God having considered him worthy (from καταξιόω) “to be found in the west” (*Rom.* 2:2). In light of the immediate literary context (2:1-2) this last statement may refer to a possibility or a fact, depending whether the phrase “to be found in the west” refers specifically to his martyrdom (his imminent arrival in Rome (the west) is certain, but his martyrdom is not). In any case, the common feature of these four verses is that in order to attain his desired martyrdom⁸² he must be worthy to receive it. Because according to Ignatius martyrdom requires worthiness, it therefore is, by implication, a privilege (rather than a misfortune that must simply be endured). It is a privilege that is given by the grace (*Rom.* 1:2a) and mercy of God (*Trall.* 12:3b).

Ignatius and Polycarp both present suffering (on account of Jesus) in general as a privilege: while Ignatius calls his chains, in which he suffers (*Rom.* 5:1), his “spiritual pearls” (τοὺς πνευματικούς μαργαρίτας; *Eph.* 11:2), Polycarp calls the chains of the imprisoned believers their “diadems” (or crowns; διαδήματα; *Phil* 1:1b). In both verses the implication is that the chains of the believers make them spiritually rich. Furthermore, Polycarp describes these bound believers as “those who are truly chosen by God” (*Phil* 1:1b), implying that their suffering is a privilege, since the chains are part of what God has called them for. Finally, Polycarp notes that “the poor and those who are persecuted” on account of righteousness (ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης; i.e., because of their commitment to Christ) are in reality blessed (μακάριοι), because God's (heavenly) kingdom belongs to them (*Phil* 2:3b). It is through their hardships, which are therefore a privilege, that the suffering believers inherit an eternal reward –

⁸² While Ignatius' being found in the west (*Rom.* 2:2) may be a reference to his martyrdom, his mention of his goal (1:1b) and lot (*Trall.* 12:3b) undoubtedly are (Schoedel (1985:160, 168) agrees). So is Ignatius' mention of his desire to suffer (4:2a), since he already suffers plenty as a captive in the present (5:2a; *Rom.* 5:1).

just as in Romans 4:3 it is through suffering that Ignatius gets to “rise up free in him”.

3.4.9. Future hope in suffering

Despite his present suffering from the Roman soldiers' ongoing mistreatment (*Rom.* 5:1) and his imminent suffering in the arena Ignatius has great hope for the future, as is evident particularly from his repeated reference to his eventual reaching of God (*Eph.* 12:2; *Magn.* 1:3; *Rom.* 1:2; 2:1; 4:1; *Smyrn.* 11:1; *Pol.* 7:1). In *Smyrnaeans* 9:2 the believer's reaching of God after death (“you will reach him”) is equated to his reward (or recompense; ἀμοιβή) being God himself (“God is your reward”). The believer's reward for his faithful endurance, then, is that he is able to enjoy God's presence – note that in all of the verses referenced above God is the direct object of the verb '(ἐπι)τυγχάνω' (I attain or reach). Thus, in the midst of his suffering Ignatius constantly bears in mind the reality that he will be in God's presence and he extends this reality to his readers as well (*Magn.* 1:3; *Smyrn.* 9:2).

Ignatius considers his martyrdom as the *means* through which he can reach God (rather than the *cause* for reaching him – in that his martyrdom would merit his salvation): it is through his death that he is able to enter into God's presence (*Rom.* 2:1; 4:1; *Pol.* 7:1). He notes in *Romans* 2:1 that his martyrdom is in fact an opportunity⁸³ to reach God and in the following verse he states that it is good (for him) to die (literally, 'to set from the world to God'), in order that he would rise to him. Some verses later Ignatius further finds hope in the fact that he “will rise up free” in Christ (4:3b) – that is, no longer bound in chains (BDAG). Because his current captivity (literally, 'his carrying around of chains') will ultimately result in his death, it is likewise considered the means through which he will rise up (to heaven; *Eph.* 11:2). Because they are the gateway to God's presence Ignatius views his captivity, suffering and death in thoroughly positive terms.

In his letter to Polycarp (2:3) Ignatius writes that the prize for the believer's self-control (which includes patient endurance of suffering; 3:1b) is “incorruptibility and eternal life” (ἀφθαρσία καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος). Thus, the afterlife of the enduring believer,

⁸³ Although the phrase in this verse literally reads 'For I will never have a time such as this to reach God', the noun 'καιρὸν' (time) can, in this verse, also be rendered as 'opportunity' (L&N).

which is characterised by the enjoyment of God's glorious presence, is everlasting – a reward perfect in quality and extent.

Clement of Rome and Polycarp follow similar lines, although they treat this topic much less extensively than Ignatius does. Clement reveals that the believer's patient endurance of suffering will be greatly rewarded in heaven, just as it has been the case with Peter, Paul, Danaids and Dircae (*1 Clem.* 5:4-6:2): the apostle Peter, who endured many trials, went to the place of glory (ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸν... τόπον τῆς δόξης), which he deserved (ὀφειλόμενον; BDAG; *1 Clem.* 5:4). Likewise, Paul, who also endured numerous trials, such as imprisonments, exile and stoning, received the prize of going to heaven (literally: 'and he went to the holy place'; 5:5-7). Furthermore, Danaids and Dircae too are stated to have received a "noble reward" for the endurance of their suffering (6:2). Just as with Peter and Paul, Danaids' and Dircae's "noble reward" likewise refers to them receiving a place in heaven. Finally, Polycarp notes that those who are poor and persecuted because of their commitment to Christ (literally: on account of righteousness) are blessed, "for theirs is the kingdom of God" (*Pol. Phil* 2:3b). Their reward for enduring the trials of poverty⁸⁴ and persecution, while it has already been promised to them ('theirs is...'), will be fully given to them for their enjoyment in their afterlife.

Clement of Rome reveals that there is hope for the suffering believer even in regard to his more immediate future, that is, while he is still alive on earth. He writes that the righteous (i.e., the believer) has many afflictions (*1 Clem.* 22:7), just as the sinner (i.e., the unbeliever) does as well (22:8a). However, God hears the cries of the former (v. 7). BDAG clarifies that the verb 'εἰσακούω' (I hear) in this context does not merely mean 'hear' but implies an actual response after the hearing. This is confirmed by what follows in verse 7: God *delivers* the believer from all his troubles – this is stated twice for emphasis. The suffering believer, who sets his hope on God, will thus be surrounded by and experience his mercy (22:8b). Similarly, Clement, by quoting Psalm 12:5, notes that God will arise and aid the believers who groan due to their

⁸⁴ Some of the Philippians experienced poverty as a result of their neighbours' persecution and hatred towards them (*Pol. Phil* 12:3).

poverty⁸⁵ – by placing them in safety and dealing boldly with them (*1 Clem.* 15:6-7). Thus, for the believer who suffers from poverty (which is in some cases a result of his commitment to Christ; see Gregory and Tuckett 2005:363-364) there is great hope that God will soon intervene and aid him in his struggles.

3.4.10. The believer's appropriate response to suffering

The Apostolic Fathers instruct their readers to patiently endure their hardships – often by exhorting them (or themselves desiring) to imitate the examples of patient endurance that others have set before them. Ignatius writes to Polycarp that it is necessary that they continuously⁸⁶ endure all things (*Pol.* 3:1b). While this exhortation to endure suffering is found even more emphatically in Polycarp's letter to the Philippians (8:2-9:1; see section 3.3.4.3.), it is at times merely implied: Clement of Rome, for instance, presents recent examples of persons who have patiently endured their suffering (*1 Clem.* 5:2-6:2) and he implies that his readers must follow these examples (5:7b; 6:1b). Later in his letter (45:3-7a) Clement provides further examples of patient endurance that his readers, by implication, must imitate (although here the implication is weaker).

Ignatius expresses his desire to be an imitator of the apostle Paul (literally: in whose footsteps I may be found; *Eph.* 12:2b) and exhorts the Ephesians “to be imitators of the Lord” (10:3a). Because both verses revolve around opposition and persecution from unbelievers, the endurance of suffering is, by implication, included in each verse⁸⁷. Finally, Ignatius' desire “to be an imitator” of Christ's suffering (*Rom.* 6:3a) naturally includes that he likewise desires to endure this suffering as Christ did. Thus, the one response which the Apostolic Fathers repeatedly emphasise is the believer's patient endurance of his hardships.

⁸⁵ Although Clement's reference to the needy does not explicitly refer to poor believers specifically but to the poor in general, it appears that in this context (where he contrasts the proud and the humble in the church; 15:1-16:1) Clement has in mind the lowly and humble believers.

⁸⁶ The infinitive 'ὑπομένειν' is built on the present tense stem and thus refers to a continuous action (Mounce 2009:245).

⁸⁷ The primary concern in Ephesians 10:3 is, however, how the believer must respond to those unbelievers who oppose and persecute him (vv. 1-2).

3.5. Conclusion

In an attempt to understand the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering this chapter has examined some issues regarding the historical-cultural background of that theology, analysed four key passages on the topic (*1 Clem.* 45:7b-8; *Ign. Rom.* 5:1-3; *Ign. Smyrn.* 4:2; *Pol. Phil* 8:2-9:2) and surveyed the other relevant texts in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. It has become evident that the suffering of the believer is a heavily repeated theme in Ignatius' epistles and that the topic also features repeatedly, although much less prominently, in the letters of Clement of Rome and Polycarp. When Ignatius and Polycarp write about the believer's suffering they usually have in mind his suffering on account of his commitment to Christ. In *1 Clement*, however, the believer's suffering is never explicitly stated to occur for that reason, but it is at times implied.

Based on the various texts that we considered in this chapter the three Apostolic Fathers share the view that the believer is characterised by suffering and opposition. It is Ignatius who most clearly and repeatedly establishes that this suffering is a result of the believer's commitment to Jesus and that for the believer such suffering is in fact a necessity, since he is following in the footsteps of his Master. Consequently, Ignatius is also convinced that it is when the believer suffers and patiently endures this suffering that he is able to authenticate his claim of being a Christian, demonstrating to those around him that he is indeed a disciple. In addition, such suffering evidences that the believer has been serving his Master faithfully. Ignatius even takes a step further and argues that martyrdom, although it does not offer salvation, is the way to true discipleship in that the believer is not only able to more closely resemble Jesus and his own disciples, but also to become a true disciple himself. Because according to Ignatius the believer must follow in Christ's footsteps as closely as possible, this imitation ideally includes martyrdom. In other words, while suffering and opposition must *necessarily* characterise the believer, death through martyrdom is a *preferable option* and, to Ignatius, the ultimate goal which he so deeply desires for a number of sensible reasons.

Ignatius and Polycarp present the believer's suffering on account of Christ (including his martyrdom) not as a misfortune that must simply be endured, but as a privilege

given by God's grace, since through this suffering the believer bestows a variety of blessings and benefits on himself, as well as on others: it is through his suffering that the believer increases in spiritual wealth, gets to rise up free in Christ and inherit an eternal reward in heaven, and it is through his martyrdom in particular that the believer is able to enter into God's presence. In addition, the suffering of the believers is, according to Ignatius, a blessing (and even a necessity) to the church, for it is through this suffering that it has both been elected and united. And finally, the believer's suffering can confer benefits on others: Ignatius regards his suffering and death in some ways to be *for* his readers, and Clement, by recounting examples from the past, reveals that the believer's willing sacrificial suffering (which at times even includes his death) can, in certain instances, physically benefit others by allowing them to stay alive, free or fed.

The three Apostolic Fathers repeatedly instruct their readers to patiently endure their hardships – Ignatius and Polycarp do this more directly and emphatically than Clement does. Their instruction frequently includes an exhortation for their readers (or wish for themselves) to imitate the examples that Jesus and various faithful believers have set before them. Polycarp clarifies that the believer's motives for imitating Christ's example are gratitude and love for him, as well as obedience to his word. The only other explicit instruction regarding how believers must respond to their suffering comes from Polycarp, who urges his readers to glorify Christ in the midst of their suffering (*Phil 8:2*).

The most prominent theme in the Apostolic Fathers in connection to the believer's suffering is the future hope he can have in the midst of his suffering. The Apostolic Fathers emphasise that the suffering believer will receive a reward for his patient endurance: eternal life in heaven where he will be able to enjoy God's glorious presence. Thus, Ignatius, because he knows that his captivity, suffering and death are the gateway to God's presence, views these in thoroughly positive terms – even to the point where he desperately longs for his death in the arena. It is Clement who extends hope also to the believers' more immediate future on earth, for he writes that God, who is sovereign and excellent, lets the suffering believers experience his mercy by intervening and aiding them in their struggles – by fighting for them,

delivering them, placing them in safety and keeping them safe (often physically, but *a/ways* spiritually).

Chapter 4

An evaluation of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' understanding of suffering

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an evaluation of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' understanding of suffering as discussed in the two previous chapters. Each theology of suffering will be evaluated in light of the original readers' socio-historical background (and occasionally with the help of narrative criticism⁸⁸) in order to determine which facets of the two theologies of suffering would, on the one hand, have had positive effects on the readers (strengths) and, on the other hand, which facets would have possibly affected the readers negatively (possible weaknesses).

4.2. Strengths of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering

4.2.1. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life

Based on the examined texts of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers they repeatedly clarify that suffering is a normal component of the believer's life – that every believer

⁸⁸ Narrative criticism is an entirely literary approach to understanding the text. It neither considers the real author, nor the real readers, but merely the text at hand. It does, however, consider the implied author and implied readers, both of whom are hypothetical and presupposed by the text. One of the primary goals of this approach is to discover the implied readers' expected responses to the text (Powell 1990:19-20).

is called to continuously suffer the same kind of opposition and persecution which Jesus has suffered before them (see sections 2.4.3. and 3.4.2.). Considering that at that time believers, because they were frequently hated in the Greco-Roman world, underwent opposition and persecution from the Jewish religious leaders, Greco-Roman society and at times even from the Roman government (see sections 2.2.1.3., 2.2.1.4., 3.2.1.1. and 3.2.1.2.), it is likely that a good number of the readers were wondering why life as a Christian was so hard, especially in light of the fact that believers walk with a loving and omnipotent God. While some believers were probably confused and discouraged, others may have had doubts (whether Christianity is the right way and whether God is really loving and almighty) and feelings of unrest, resentment and maybe even despair. The historical-cultural background thus suggests that Paul and the Apostolic Fathers wanted their readers to know that they were called to suffer and that they would, as a result, stand firm in their faith.

The same can be argued from a purely literary approach: in 1 Thessalonians 3:3, for instance, the implied author undoubtedly has this goal in mind, as he states that since the implied readers are destined to suffer, they must not “be moved by these afflictions”. Similarly, the implied author of 1 Clement recounts numerous examples from the past of believers who have, in the face of great opposition, not been moved by their suffering but stood fast in their commitment to God (*1 Clem.* 5:4-6:2; 45:4-7a). The implied author evidently exhorts the implied readers to follow these examples (5:7b-6:1).

Thus, Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' repeated clarification that believers are naturally characterised by suffering seems to have been intended to bring about several positive effects in the lives of their readers, namely, to replace their negative feelings noted above with a positive attitude of joy, contentment and peace in the midst of their struggles. The authors, by communicating that it is when the believer suffers that he is in fact walking according to God's call and will, apparently aimed to remove from their readers any desire to be suffering-free (since if they did not suffer they would not have been Christians) and to help them not to give in to pressures but to stand fast and endure their struggles, just as the faithful believers in the past have

endured them.

4.2.2. Correction of a negative perception of suffering by emphasising its various benefits and good purposes

Another strength of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering is that they frequently note the different benefits and good purposes of the believer's suffering and thus correct a negative perception on such suffering: Paul explains that suffering serves as an opportunity for the believer to experience God's power and comfort presently (see sections 2.4.5. and 2.4.6.), and that suffering produces future eternal benefits for the believer (see section 2.4.7). In addition, Paul's afflictions are stated to have the purposes of keeping him humble (2 Cor 12:7), making him rely on God's strength (2 Cor 1:9b), producing in him endurance, character and hope (Rom 5:3-4), and manifesting in his body the death and life of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10-11). Similarly, the Apostolic Fathers note that the believer's suffering can benefit others in different ways – physically and spiritually (see section 3.4.6.). Ignatius, in particular, reveals that while one purpose of the church' suffering is its establishment of unity (see section 3.4.7.), his own suffering and martyrdom have the purpose of authenticating his Christianity (see section 3.4.2.) and making him a true disciple (Ign. *Eph.* 1:2). Because of all these good purposes of suffering Paul repeatedly illustrates that suffering works together for the believer's good (see section 2.4.9.) and the Apostolic Fathers repeatedly reveal that for the believer to suffer is indeed a privilege (see section 3.4.8.).

As I have noted earlier, suffering was predominantly viewed in punitive terms by the Jews (see section 2.2.1.1.). In addition, although in Greco-Roman society suffering was viewed more positively than in the Jewish mindset, it was nevertheless frequently viewed rather negatively⁸⁹ (see section 2.2.1.2.). It is therefore reasonable

⁸⁹ In the first-century Greco-Roman world suffering could be viewed positively or negatively, depending on the sufferer's circumstances. Although in theory a person's suffering was often viewed in a positive light (as an opportunity to demonstrate one's virtue and an opportunity to learn and produce good character) and the Stoics were to be unaffected by suffering, it is probable that once people actually suffered, many would have eventually been affected by it and come to view it in a more negative light (see section 2.2.1.2.). In regard to the suffering of the Christians in particular (which sometimes included even their death), because it was frequently a direct result of their non-conformity to Greco-Roman values (see section 2.2.1.4.), it is plausible that their resultant suffering was usually viewed by society as deserved, and thus in a negative, rather than a positive

to suggest that Paul and the Apostolic Fathers tried to aid their readers to adopt their positive perspective on suffering. This seems plausible in light of the numerous examples and illustrations that are supplied in the previous paragraph.

The same conclusion can be reached by approaching this issue through narrative criticism: there are two texts where the implied authors evidently display a thoroughly positive perspective on suffering and where it seems that they exhort the implied readers to adopt their positive perspective (Phil 1:12-18; Ign. *Rom.* 5:1-3). While this can be reasonably assumed in Romans 5:1-3, in Philippians 1:12-18 this is even more evident, as the implied author presents several examples throughout the first half of his letter which must be imitated by the implied readers (i.e., his own example, as well as that of Jesus, Timothy and Epaphroditus; Phil 1:12-2:30), who themselves are suffering at the hands of certain opponents (1:28-30). In addition, that the implied readers were expected to adopt the implied authors' positive perspective on suffering can also be seen in 2 Corinthians 6:8b-10, as well as in Polycarp's Philippians 2:3b⁹⁰.

Thus, it seems that Paul and the Apostolic Fathers intended to help their readers to change their probably predominantly negative perception of suffering towards a more positive assessment of it, so that they would learn to understand that their own suffering is neither disadvantageous nor pointless, but indeed a blessing, since it is the means through which God accomplishes many of his good purposes and plans for them. The authors apparently aimed to improve their readers' attitude in the midst of their suffering, as well as their response to that suffering, so that rather than being discouraged, anxious and hopeless, the readers would have learned to be joyful, grateful and content in their suffering. And rather than to respond to their suffering with grumbling, they would have learned to praise God in their suffering and to endure it humbly, patiently and with trust, knowing that it is for their good and at times even for the good of others (even if they might not have known yet how exactly this was so). And finally, knowing that their suffering is not something to be ashamed of,

light – just as the suffering derived from a beating or another form of punishment was viewed negatively (with contempt and suspicion; see section 2.2.1.2.).

⁹⁰ In the first text the implied readers learn that although from a human perspective the implied author appears to be poor, sorrowful and dying, he is in fact richly blessed. In the second text the implied author notes that those who are poor and persecuted on account of their commitment to Christ are in fact blessed, for they are the heirs of God's kingdom.

they would have been able to start enduring their struggles with more confidence and peace in their hearts.

4.2.3. Future hope in suffering

Paul and the Apostolic Fathers repeatedly point out that the believer, in the midst of his current suffering, can have great hope for the future: he can be hopeful and look forward to his future reward in heaven, where he will share in Christ's glory for all eternity – a reward perfect in quality and extent. Clement reveals that there is even hope for the believer's more immediate future on earth, for God is stated to intervene and help the suffering believer, so that he is able to experience his deliverance and safety. Such divine deliverance and sustenance do not only occur at the spiritual level, but often also at the physical level (see sections 2.4.8. and 3.4.9.).

The lives of the readers of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers were frequently characterised by hardships. They were occasionally opposed by the Jewish religious leaders and at times subject to hatred, suspicion, rumours and slander from Greco-Roman society, and thus they naturally suffered economic and political disadvantages. In addition, they sporadically suffered persecution from the Roman government. The danger of being formally charged before the Roman authorities and consequently being convicted on the sole basis of their Christian faith was ever present to the believers after A.D. 65 (see sections 2.2.1.3., 2.2.1.4., 3.2.1.1. and 3.2.1.2.).

That the authors intended to encourage and instil hope in the readers is nowhere more evident than in those letters that are addressed to believers explicitly stated to suffer. In Philippians 1:28-30 the implied author acknowledges the suffering of the implied readers, exhorts them not to be afraid and encourages them with the fact that they will reach salvation but that their opponents will ultimately be destroyed. He further tries to cheer them up by repeatedly asking them to rejoice (Phil 2:17-18; 3:1; 4:4). The same is true in 1-2 Thessalonians, where the implied author, employing similar strategies, makes it his goal to instil hope and good courage in the implied readers (1 Thess 5:16, 18; 2 Thess 1:6-9; 2:16-17a), who are likewise stated to be afflicted (1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 1:5, 7). Finally, that the implied readers of Polycarp's Philippians were expected to be hopeful and encouraged in the midst of their

suffering (Pol. *Phil* 12:3) is evident from the reference of the implied author to Jesus' death and resurrection for their sake (8:1-2; 9:2b), as well as from the fact that they will receive a future reward in heaven, just as the faithful believers from the past have already received it (9:2a).

Thus, it seems that the repeated theme of the believer's future hope was intended to help the readers to become more encouraged and hopeful in the midst of their difficult circumstances, and to not focus on their grim present reality, which was only temporary, but on the fact that they will ultimately be freed from all afflictions and eternally rewarded in heaven. In addition to instilling great hope in them this theme would have given them joy, comfort and peace, so that they were likely encouraged to not abandon their faith, nor to compromise it, but to keep on faithfully serving God in their hostile world.

4.2.4. Focus on the character of God

Paul and Clement, in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 and 1 Clement 45:4-7b, do not focus on the believer's suffering, nor on the people who inflict this suffering, but rather on who God is and what he does as a result. While Paul emphasises God's mercy, compassion and omnipotence, Clement focuses on God's sovereignty and excellence. The former reveals that God comforts and at times physically delivers the afflicted believer, and the latter points out that God fights on behalf of the suffering believer, defends him and keeps him safe. In other texts, which likewise revolve around the believer's suffering, Paul frequently focuses on God's omnipotence, love, grace, faithfulness and comfort (Rom 8:35-39; 2 Cor 4:7-12; 7:6; 12:9-10; 13:4; Phil 4:13; 2 Thess 1:7; 2 Tim 2:8-13; 3:11; 4:17-18), and Clement, as well as Ignatius, focus on God's omnipotence and mercy (*1 Clem.* 22:7-8; *Smyrn.* 4:2b).

The readers of Paul, Clement and Ignatius, who suffered in various ways from opposition and persecution, would have been encouraged to adopt their perspective, that is, not to focus on their ongoing hardships, but on the character of God and his deeds. With this focus on God's character the readers would have always had reason to be hopeful and grateful, for they would have been aware that God is able to help them (due to his omnipotence) and is also interested to do so (due to his love and mercy). Knowing that God's mercy, comfort and help are never far away would likely

have made their difficult and often uncertain circumstances much brighter.

4.2.5. Provision of practical examples to follow

Another strength of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering is their provision of numerous practical examples which their readers could follow. Thus, rather than merely following lists of instructions in how to deal with hardships the readers were able to imitate the examples they had witnessed first-hand. First of all, Paul and Ignatius provide their readers with their own virtuous examples of how to appropriately deal with suffering: Paul is content (2 Cor 12:9b-10; Phil 4:11), rejoices (Phil 1:18b; 2:17) and praises God in the midst of his suffering (2 Cor 1:3). He does not lose heart (4:16a) but has great faith (vv. 13, 18) and sets his hope on God (1:10). Ignatius likewise has a positive outlook while suffering: he does not focus on this suffering, nor on those who cause it, but on the benefits of it (*Rom.* 5:1). He generally views his suffering and death in thoroughly positive terms. In addition, Paul supplies his own example of humility (in suffering) in Philippians 1:12-24, as well as in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 and 4:7-18. Wherever Paul and Ignatius reveal how they view and deal with suffering there is the implication that their readers should adopt their perspective and actions – as this was a commonly employed literary convention in Greco-Roman letter writing (see section 2.2.1.5.; however, it seems that Ignatius does not expect his readers to necessarily follow him in martyrdom, for several reasons why he deems his martyrdom necessary are based on his own specific circumstances⁹¹). Second, Ignatius (*Eph.* 10:3) and Polycarp (*Phil* 8:2) exhort their readers to follow Jesus' example of patient endurance – an example of which the readers had ample written documents about. And third, Clement (*1 Clem.* 5:2-6:2; 45:3-7a) and Polycarp (*Phil* 9:1) refer their readers to the examples of believers from the past, who endured their suffering patiently (some of them the readers had observed with their own eyes) and whom the readers therefore had to imitate.

This method of providing the readers with actual examples they could imitate was

⁹¹ That is, Ignatius has already fallen victim to persecution, was bound and sent on his way to Rome. In addition, he needs to be martyred, rather than set free, in order to avoid the spreading of possible rumours of his apostatising. And finally, Ignatius deems his martyrdom necessary in order to prove, in light of his seemingly alleged failure in the Syrian church, his faithfulness (see end of section 3.3.2.3.).

much more effective than merely supplying them with lists of instructions in how to appropriately deal with suffering, for in that way the applications of the various truths about suffering had already been illustrated and could thus “conveniently” be followed by the readers. In addition, the various examples, which the readers saw and could read about, likely caused them to admire these faithful individuals, giving them inspiration and the natural desire to follow in their footsteps.

4.2.6. Supplying the motivation for the endurance of suffering

Polycarp reveals the reasons why the believers must endure their suffering: out of gratitude for what Jesus has endured for their sakes (*Phil* 8:1-2), out of obedience to his word (9:1a) and, by implication, out of love for him (9:2b). In Paul's and the rest of the Apostolic Fathers' writings it is evident that the readers' motivation for their endurance of suffering must be their gratitude to God (although this motivation is not explicitly stated as such, as is the case in Polycarp's *Philippians* 8:1-9:2). The readers are told, for instance, what Jesus has endured for them (e.g., *Phil* 2:6-8; *Ign. Smyrn.* 1:2), that their suffering has various benefits and good purposes (see section 4.2.2.), that their suffering ultimately works for their good (see section 2.4.9.), that nothing can separate them from God's love (*Rom* 8:38-39) and that they can always have hope for the future (see sections 2.4.8. and 3.4.9.). Thus, Polycarp, and to a lesser degree Paul, Clement and Ignatius, rather than simply exhorting their readers to endure their suffering, provide them with the proper motivation to do so (this motivation primarily includes one's gratitude and love for Jesus). They would have therefore endured their suffering not out of compulsion, but because they naturally had the desire to imitate Jesus' endurance. To have this proper motivation would have not only made their endurance more joyful, but it would likely have helped them not to give in to the temptation to apostatise in the face of great pressures, dangers and suffering.

4.3. Possible weaknesses of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering

4.3.1. The role of the readers in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Paul establishes that God comforts him and Timothy in their

afflictions in order that they can comfort others who are afflicted – with the same comfort they continuously receive from God. However, Paul does not clarify if this model is also to be applied by his readers, that is, whether they are comforted by Paul (and ultimately by God) in order that they can comfort those around them who are afflicted as well. It is unclear from the text whether the believer is generally comforted with the purpose to comfort others, or whether it is merely Paul's special role as an apostle and letter writer to suffer, be comforted and consequently comfort others. In other words, are the readers merely to receive the comfort from Paul and Timothy, or are they tasked to comfort others as well? At a time where the believers suffered in various ways from non-official opposition by Greco-Roman society (see sections 2.2.1.4. and 3.2.1.2.) this would have been an important issue to clarify. While 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 probably implies that the readers should follow Paul's example and extend their experienced comfort to the afflicted believers around them, Paul could have clarified the role of the readers and, if my assumption is correct, could have explicitly extended this principle to the readers. In any case, they needed to know whether their received comfort included the responsibility (or privilege) on their part to share it with others. Such a clarification would have eliminated the readers' potential confusion regarding this issue and would have extended their focus on their partnership with Paul and Timothy (as recipients of comfort) to how they could partner with other suffering believers (as givers of comfort). However, I do not see a serious problem with the lack of this clarification, for it is likely that most of the readers naturally applied this principle to others who were suffering.

4.3.2. Ignatius' notion of true discipleship through martyrdom

Several texts in Ignatius' epistles in which he speaks about his martyrdom have the potential to be misunderstood by his readers – especially Ephesians 1:2, 3:1, Trallians 5:2b and Romans 4:2, 5:1b and 5:3a, where Ignatius notes that he is not yet a disciple, that presently, while being on his way to Rome, he is just beginning to be a disciple and that once he is martyred he will truly be a disciple. There was the danger (although he nowhere exhorts his readers to become martyrs as well) that the readers would have wrongly interpreted these verses in meritorious terms, as if Ignatius were saying that his martyrdom somehow contributes to some part to his salvation, and that consequently every believer must strive for martyrdom if he wants

to become a true disciple. As I have shown earlier (see section 3.4.3.), this is not what Ignatius means by becoming a disciple through martyrdom, but the potential for these verses to be misunderstood nevertheless remains.

Ignatius clarifies in Romans 5:1b that he is neither justified by his present suffering, nor by his faithful actions in the midst of such suffering, and states in Philadelphians 8:2 that he views his justification as being based on the death and resurrection of Jesus, as well as on his faith in him. In addition, he writes in other letters that it is through the suffering/death of Jesus that the believer has (eternal) life (*Trall.* 2:1b; 9:1-2; *Smyrn.* 2:1a; 6:2b-7:1) and peace (*Trall.* salutation). However, Ignatius would have done well (1) to clarify more frequently throughout his letters that martyrdom does not gain the believer any merit and (2) to clarify what exactly he means by the four verses noted in the previous paragraph. Because the readers of Ignatius' letters suffered in various ways and because they knew that their suffering was a necessary component of their lives as believers (see section 4.2.1.), there was the danger that some of them would have extended this principle to martyrdom – believing that such is also a necessary component of the believer's life, which is, of course, not the case (see last part of section 3.4.3.). In order to prevent his readers from possibly developing a faulty understanding about the believer's martyrdom, such clarifications would have been especially helpful in his letter to the Ephesians, which features two of the four potentially misunderstood verses noted above, and which does not otherwise explicitly indicate that salvation comes through faith, rather than works. Although the original readers likely did not misunderstand Ignatius as much as modern scholarship does⁹², it is possible that at least some of them did.

4.3.3. Insufficient focus on the character of God

I have earlier noted (see section 4.2.4.) that one of the strengths of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering is that they at times do not focus on the

⁹² On the one hand modern scholarship often misunderstands Ignatius' general attitude towards martyrdom, as it often ascribes mental illness or suicidal desires to him (Moss 2012:55). On the other hand modern scholarship often also misunderstands some aspects of his teaching on martyrdom, especially in regard to verses such as Ephesians 1:2, 3:1, Trallians 5:2b and Romans 4:2. For instance, Martin (2014:618), when commenting on 2 Corinthians 12:10, notes that Ignatius was guilty of having emphasised merit instead of faith. Similarly, Ivan (2013:172) holds that according to Ignatius "salvation becomes more certain" if one is martyred.

believer's suffering, nor on the people who cause it, but rather on who God is and what he does when the believer suffers (Paul does so quite frequently). However, in light of the fact that the readers of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers were continuously experiencing opposition from the people around them, I believe that this focus on God's character is not sufficiently featured in the Apostolic Fathers when they write about the believer's suffering (this is especially true in the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp). In his letter to the Romans, for instance, Ignatius at times seems to revolve too much around his own suffering and upcoming death. More of a focus on the character of God and his deeds in response to the believer's hardships would have certainly proved refreshing for the readers, who would have been inspired to adopt such a perspective. At a time where much in the world was uncertain for Christians it was important for them to focus and hold on to God, who is unchanging and reliable, and whose love, mercy and power are always available to the believer. It is such a focus that would have made the readers grow more hopeful in the midst of their difficulties. Yet, a lack thereof would probably have resulted eventually in the suffering believers becoming more self-centred, frustrated and bitter (which evidently neither Ignatius nor Polycarp were, for God's attributes must have played a significant role in their own spiritual lives).

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has presented a brief evaluation of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' understanding of suffering (as outlined in chapters 2 and 3). In order to determine their various strengths and possible weaknesses, each theology of suffering has been evaluated in light of the readers' socio-historical background. Seven shared strengths, which would have had various positive effects on the readers, have been identified and described: Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' clarification that suffering is a normal component of the believer's life, that his suffering has various benefits and good purposes, that his suffering is something good and must therefore be perceived in a positive light, and that he can have great hope for the future in the midst of his suffering. Additional strengths of their theology of suffering are their occasional focus on God's character, their provision of numerous practical examples for their readers to follow, as well as their clarification regarding the believer's proper motivation for enduring his hardships. These seven positive features probably helped

the readers of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers to have a better understanding of their own suffering, to accept and appreciate this suffering, to be joyful, grateful, peaceful and hopeful in the midst of it, and to endure it humbly and patiently.

On the other hand, Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering also features some weaknesses: in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Paul does not clarify the role of his readers – whether they are merely to receive Paul's comfort or whether they are given the responsibility to comfort others in turn. In addition, Ignatius' notion of true discipleship through martyrdom has the potential to be misunderstood by his readers – that they would wrongly interpret verses such as Ephesians 1:2, 3:1, Trallians 5:2b and Romans 4:2 in meritorious terms. And finally, the Apostolic Fathers' focus on God's character in the midst of the believer's suffering is not featured frequently enough. These three issues would have possibly had negative effects on the readers in that (1) they might have missed out on the fact that they were to comfort others with the comfort they themselves had received and as a result may have lacked the initiative to do so, (2) they might have developed a faulty understanding of the believer's martyrdom – that martyrdom contributes to some part to his salvation and is thus a necessary component of his life, and (3) it might have resulted in the readers not focussing enough on who God is and what he does in the context of their suffering, with the possible result that they would eventually have become more self-focused, frustrated and less hopeful.

Chapter 5

The two theologies of suffering in comparison

5.1. Introduction

This chapter compares Paul's theology of suffering (as discussed in chapter 2) with that of the Apostolic Fathers (as discussed in chapter 3). It will point out the various commonalities and differences of the two theologies – regarding both, their overall topics and the details within each of these topics. The chapter will highlight the four most significant commonalities, as well as the three most important differences, and the plausible reasons for these major differences will be supplied. It will become clear that Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering vary greatly because the authors, as well as their readers, found themselves in different contexts and thus, when writing about the believer's suffering, they often needed to communicate unique, context-specific ideas.

5.2. Most significant commonalities between the two theologies of suffering

5.2.1. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life

Paul and the Apostolic Fathers several times explain to their readers that believers, since they are following in their Master's footsteps (1 Cor 11:1; Ign. *Eph.* 10:3), are naturally characterised by suffering and opposition. They hold that faith and suffering

belong together⁹³. This idea appears in 11 texts (in 16 verses; Phil 1:29; 1 Thess 3:3-4; 2 Tim 3:12; *1 Clem.* 22:7; Ign. *Magn.* 5:2b; Ign. *Smyrn.* 4:2; this notion is implied in *1 Clem.* 45:3-7a; Ign. *Magn.* 8:2a; Ign. *Rom.* 3:3b; Ign. *Smyrn.* 11:1a; Pol. *Phil* 1:1).

5.2.2. Suffering for the benefit of others/the church

When writing about their own personal suffering Paul and Ignatius in 14 texts (in 16 verses) clarify that this suffering is in some ways for their readers, that is, their readers gain different benefits from their suffering (2 Cor 1:6; 4:12, 15; 12:15; Eph 3:1; 3:13; Phil 1:24-25; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 2:10; Ign. *Eph.* 21:1a; Ign. *Smyrn.* 10:2a; Ign. *Pol.* 2:3b; 6:1). These benefits are primarily spiritual in nature, rather than physical. Paul's and Ignatius' writings then, by extension of this principle, as well as the epistle of Clement (*1 Clem.* 55:1-2), reveal that the believer's suffering can, and often does, bestow certain benefits on others – and especially on the church.

5.2.3. Future hope in suffering

25 texts (43 verses) in Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' writings revolve around the future hope of the suffering believer (Rom 8:17-18, 23; 2 Cor 1:10-11; 4:14, 16-18; 5:1-4; Phil 3:10-11; 2 Thess 1:7; 2 Tim 2:12; 4:17; *1 Clem.* 5:4-6:2; 15:6-7; 22:7-8; 45:7b-8; Ign. *Eph.* 12:2; Ign. *Magn.* 1:3; Ign. *Rom.* 1:2-2:2; 4:1, 3; Ign. *Smyrn.* 9:2; 11:1; Ign. *Pol.* 2:3; 7:1; Pol. *Phil* 2:3b; 9:2). The letters of Paul and Ignatius, in particular (both of whom are suffering on account of Jesus and have great hope for the future in the midst of their hardships), share three common elements in regard to their future hope: they both look forward to (1) being raised/resurrected (2 Cor 4:14a; Phil 3:10-11; Ign. *Rom.* 2:2; 4:3; note that this idea also appears in 1 Clement 45:8); (2) being brought into God's presence/reaching God (2 Cor 4:14b; 2 Tim 4:17; Ign. *Eph.* 12:2; Ign. *Magn.* 1:3; Ign. *Rom.* 1:2-2:1; 4:1; Ign. *Smyrn.* 9:2; 11:1; Ign. *Pol.* 7:1; this point also features in Polycarp's Philippians 9:2); and (3) enjoying incorruptibility and eternal life (Paul and Ignatius both reveal that the believer's future reward will be

⁹³ It is therefore not surprising that Paul and the Apostolic Fathers, when writing about the believer's suffering, usually have in mind his suffering due to his commitment to Christ, as they specify 18 times that the believer's suffering occurs for that reason (Rom 8:36; 2 Cor 4:11a; 12:10; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:9; Ign. *Eph.* 1:2; 3:1; 11:2; 12:2a; Ign. *Trall.* 12:2a; Ign. *Rom.* 1:1; 6:1; Ign. *Phld.* 5:1; 7:2; Ign. *Smyrn.* 9:2b; Pol. *Phil* 2:3b; 8:2). However, because this commonality is more of a repeated clarification than a repeated topic, this aspect of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering receives less attention than the four major commonalities featured in this section.

perfect in quality and extent; 2 Cor 5:1-4; Ign. *Pol.* 2:3).

Paul and Clement share two important common features regarding the believer's future hope in suffering. First, both authors repeatedly write about the eventual partaking of the believer in (divine) glory in heaven (Rom 8:17-18; 2 Cor 4:17; 1 *Clem.* 5:4-6; 45:8). And second, both authors write about the believer's hope not only for his more distant future in heaven, but also for his more immediate future on earth (2 Cor 1:10-11; 4:16; 1 *Clem.* 15:6-7; 22:7-8; 45:7b). Both of them include the idea that God will deliver (ῥύσεται) the believer (2 Cor 1:10; 1 *Clem.* 22:7).

5.2.4. The believer's appropriate response to suffering

Both Paul and the Apostolic Fathers devote 19 texts to how the believer must respond to his suffering (Ro 12:12; 1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 1:3-11; 12:10; Phil 1:18b; 2:17-18; 4:4, 11-13; 1 Thess 5:16, 18; 2 Tim 2:24; 4:5; 1 *Clem.* 5:4-6:2; 45:4-8; Ign. *Eph.* 10:3a; 12:2b; Ign. *Rom.* 6:3a; Ign. *Pol.* 3:1b; Pol. *Phil* 8:2-9:2). The one exhortation that all four authors include for their readers (and which is found in 12 of these texts) is that they must patiently endure their suffering. While this exhortation is often explicit (Rom 12:12; 2 Tim 2:24; 4:5; Ign. *Eph.* 10:3a; Ign. *Pol.* 3:1b; Pol. *Phil* 8:2-9:1), at other times it is implied (1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 1:3-11; 1 *Clem.* 5:4-6:2; 45:4-8; Ign. *Eph.* 12:2b; Ign. *Rom.* 6:3a; Pol. *Phil* 9:2). Thus, according to Paul and the Apostolic Fathers the most important response for the believer to his suffering is to patiently endure it (rather than to be disturbed by it; 1 Thess 3:3).

One secondary response, which is featured in both Paul and Polycarp, is that the afflicted believer must praise God (2 Cor 1:3) or, in other words, glorify him (Pol. *Phil* 8:2).

5.3. Other commonalities between the two theologies of suffering

5.3.1. Suffering on account of Christ

Paul and the Apostolic Fathers frequently clarify that the believer's suffering occurs on account of Christ, that is, due to his faith in and commitment to Christ. While the former does so six times throughout his letters (in Rom 8:36; 2 Cor 4:11a; 12:10; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:9), the latter do so twelve times (in Ign. *Eph.* 1:2; 3:1; 11:2; 12:2a; Ign.

Trall. 12:2a; *Ign. Rom.* 1:1; 6:1; *Ign. Phld.* 5:1; 7:2; *Ign. Smyrn.* 9:2b; *Pol. Phil* 2:3b; 8:2). In order to convey this idea both Paul and the Apostolic Fathers employ the prepositions 'ἐν' (6x), 'διὰ' (4x), 'ὑπὲρ' (4x) and 'ἐνεκεν' (3x), which function in these instances as markers of cause (see L&N 1996:778-779) and can thus be translated as 'on account of', 'because of' or 'for the sake of'. These repeated explicit clarifications reveal that Paul, Ignatius and Polycarp, when writing about the believer's suffering, usually have in mind his suffering on account of Christ. The historical background (see sections 2.2.1.3., 2.2.1.4., 3.2.1.1. and 3.2.1.2.) confirms the validity of such a focus, for in the first- and early second century much of the believer's suffering indeed resulted from his commitment to his Lord.

Because they generally regard the believer's suffering to result from his faith (and because he essentially follows Jesus' own example of suffering), Paul, Ignatius and Polycarp at times employ the idea of the believer sharing in Christ's suffering – or suffering together with Jesus (*Rom* 8:17; *2 Cor* 1:5a, 7; *Phil* 3:10; *Ign. Smyrn.* 4:2; *Pol. Phil* 9:2).

5.3.2. Death as a preferable option

Paul and Ignatius both express their desire to die and both reveal the primary reason for this desire: for them to die means to be with Christ (*2 Cor* 5:8; *Phil* 1:23b; *Ign. Trall.* 4:2a; 12:2a; *Ign. Rom.* 1:1-2:2; 4:1-2; 5:2-6:3; 7:2; 8:3; *Ign. Smyrn.* 11:1b). Because for the believer death is the gateway to God's presence Paul and Ignatius present it as a preferable option (preferable to life on earth) not only for themselves, but also, by implication, for the believers in general. They display a thoroughly positive perspective on the believer's death and thus correct the negative Greco-Roman perception of death through capital punishment (the believer's martyrdom), as well as the rather negative Greco-Roman perception of death in general.

5.3.3. Suffering as an opportunity to experience, paradoxically, God's power

The paradox of divine power in human weakness (the latter of which includes the believer's suffering) is not only featured in Paul's letters (*2 Cor* 1:8-10; 4:8-11; 6:9-10; 11:23-12:10; 13:4; *Phil* 4:13; *2 Tim* 2:9-10; 3:11; 4:17), but also, although sparingly, in those of Clement and Ignatius (*1 Clem.* 45:7b; *Ign. Smyrn.* 4:2b). In both Paul and

the Apostolic Fathers it becomes clear that there are different ways in which God's power may be manifested in the believer's weakness/suffering. For instance, while God may at times completely deliver the believer from some affliction (e.g., 2 Cor 1:8-10; 2 Tim 3:11; *1 Clem.* 45:7b), he may, at other times, "merely" preserve the afflicted believer by strengthening him in his suffering (e.g., Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 4:17a; *1 Clem.* 45:7b; Ign. *Smyrn.* 4:2b).

5.3.4. Suffering produces eternal benefits for the believer

Paul, Ignatius and Polycarp (in the latter two this is implied) hold that the believer's suffering produces in him certain eternal benefits. In other words, the believer's suffering will ultimately be followed by some future rewards and it is through his hardships that the believer inherits these rewards (Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:17; Phil 3:10-11; 2 Tim 2:12; Ign. *Eph.* 11:2; Pol. *Phil* 1:1b; 2:3b).

5.3.5. Suffering works together for the believer's good

The principle of suffering working together for the believer's good, which is explicitly stated only in Paul's Romans 8:28, appears in Paul and Ignatius: this principle is once implied by each of the two writers (1 Cor 15:30-32; Ign. *Rom.* 5:3a). In addition, both writers present at least one clear illustration of the principle (Rom 5:3-4; 2 Cor 1:4-5, 9; 4:17; 12:7, 9-10; Ign. *Eph.* salutation).

5.3.6. Suffering as a privilege

Because they frequently write about the various benefits and good purposes of suffering (for themselves, as well as for others), it becomes evident in Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' letters that for the believer to suffer on account of Christ is a privilege. Paul, Ignatius and Polycarp at times point out this fact even more directly: although they do not explicitly refer to the believer's suffering as a 'privilege', they nevertheless strongly imply that in fact it is (Phil 1:29; Ign. *Eph.* 11:2; Ign. *Trall.* 4:2a; 12:3b; Ign. *Rom.* 1:1b; 2:2; Pol. *Phil* 1:1b; 2:3b).

5.3.7. The unpleasant side of suffering

The writings of Paul and the Apostolic Fathers have revealed that the believer's suffering on account of Christ has various benefits and good purposes, and thus this

suffering works together for the believer's good (and for the good of others) and can consequently be regarded as a privilege. However, they also acknowledge that the believer's suffering does involve great pain (e.g., 2 Cor 1:8-9a; 11:23-28; 12:8; *1 Clem.* 5:2-6:2; 45:4-7a; *Ign. Rom.* 5:1, 3), causing the believer to struggle, for the suffering is, as Paul and Ignatius clarify, inflicted by the devil with the purpose to harass/torment and at times even kill the believer (2 Cor 12:7; *Ign. Rom.* 5:3).

5.4. Most significant differences between the two theologies of suffering

5.4.1. Suffering as an opportunity to experience, paradoxically, God's power

The paradox of divine power in human weakness (including suffering) features much more frequently and extensively in Paul's letters (in 9 texts or 36 verses; 2 Cor 1:8-10; 4:8-11; 6:9-10; 11:23-12:10; 13:4; Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 2:9-10; 3:11; 4:17) than in those of the Apostolic Fathers, in which the paradox only appears in two shorter texts (*1 Clem.* 45:7b; *Ign. Smyrn.* 4:2b). In addition, the paradox is explicitly described in Paul's letters (2 Cor 12:9-10; 13:4), but not in the Apostolic Fathers.

For instance, the paradox is both stated and extensively illustrated in 2 Corinthians 11:23-12:10, where Paul openly reveals and boasts in his weaknesses, for the reason that only in these weaknesses can God's gracious provision of his abundant power and protection take place (and consequently be revealed to others). Such an apology of and response to one's weaknesses cannot be found in the Apostolic Fathers.

Thus, for Paul his weakness/suffering is an essential component of his ministry – not only because it (1) allows him to experience God's power (2 Cor 12:9-10; 13:4), but also because it (2) clearly shows that this power comes from God (i.e., God's power is revealed to others through his affliction-filled-ministry; 2 Cor 4:7-9) and (3) manifests the fact that Jesus is alive (which is an indirect gospel proclamation; 2 Cor 4:10-11). Although the latter two points differ from the notion of 'suffering as an opportunity to experience God's power', they are closely related to it and they certainly are part of the broader paradox of 'divine power in human weakness'. In the Apostolic Fathers, however, both of these additional ideas are also absent.

And lastly, unlike the Apostolic Fathers Paul clarifies to his readers that a true apostle (and by implication a believer in general) is not characterised by human power, but by human weakness, as well as by the divine power that comes with such weakness – after Jesus' own example (2 Cor 13:4).

5.4.2. Suffering works together for the believer's good

The idea of suffering working together for the believer's good is explicitly stated in Paul (Rom 8:28), but not in the Apostolic Fathers. And while both Paul and Ignatius include one short text in which this idea is implied⁹⁴ (1 Cor 15:30-32; Ign. *Rom.* 5:3a), it is much more frequently illustrated throughout Paul's letters, where he writes about the various good purposes (and thus benefits) of the believer's suffering for himself⁹⁵ (in 6 texts or 9 verses; Rom 5:3-4; 2 Cor 1:4-5, 9; 4:17; 12:7, 9-10). In the Apostolic Fathers there is only one clear illustration of this principle (in Ignatius' salutation of Ephesians). The notion is therefore lacking in Clement and Polycarp, who neither have an explicit or implicit description of it, nor any clear illustrations.

In addition, Paul's clear illustrations of this principle are more practical and are thus somewhat more relevant for the readers than the one clear illustration in Ignatius: while the latter merely notes that through suffering the believers have been elected and united in the past (*Eph.* salutation), the former reveals that through suffering the believers (1) can experience God's abundant and constant comfort, and in turn comfort other afflicted believers with the same comfort (2 Cor 1:4-5), (2) can experience God's power (2 Cor 12:9-10), (3) are made to rely not on themselves but on the omnipotent God (2 Cor 1:9), (4) can be kept humble (2 Cor 12:7), (5) grow in endurance, character and hope (Rom 5:3-4) and (6) will be able to share in Christ's glory (2 Cor 4:17).

Finally, Ignatius refers particularly to his martyrdom in Romans 5:3a, thus implying that *his martyrdom* works together for his good, since through it he will be able to

⁹⁴ Yet, in contrast to Paul Ignatius implies that his martyrdom in particular, rather than his suffering in general, will work out together for his good.

⁹⁵ Paul also discusses other good purposes of suffering (2 Cor 1:6-7; 4:7, 10-11, 15; Gal 4:13; Phil 1:12-18a). However, these primarily work together not for the good of the believer himself, but for the good of others.

enjoy God's presence in heaven in the near future (v. 3a) and will be shown faithful (e.g., *Rom.* 3:2). Yet, in the various verses noted above Paul refers to his/the believer's suffering in general, and, in addition, when writing about the notion that for the believer his suffering works together for his good Paul primarily has in mind, as shown above, the various benefits which such suffering brings to the believer *in the present* – while he is still on earth.

5.4.3. Martyrdom as the way to true discipleship

Ignatius notes several times that he is not yet a disciple, that he, being on his way to Rome for his execution, is now just beginning to be one and that it is through his future martyrdom that he will become a true disciple (*Eph.* 1:2; 3:1; *Trall.* 5:2b; *Rom.* 4:2; 5:1, 3). This idea of becoming a true disciple through martyrdom, which Ignatius apparently only applies to himself rather than to believers in general⁹⁶, is absent in Paul, who considers himself to (already fully) be an apostle (e.g., *Rom* 11:13; 1 *Cor* 4:9; 2 *Cor* 1:1). In fact, Paul never even employs the term 'μαθητής' (disciple) in his writings.

As noted earlier in section 4.3.2., this notion of Ignatius becoming a true disciple through his upcoming martyrdom seems to be closely related to the idea of him being able to prove, through this martyrdom, his Christianity (*Ign. Magn.* 9:1b; *Ign. Rom.* 2:1b; 3:2; *Ign. Pol.* 7:1b) and faithfulness (*Ign. Rom.* 3:2; 4:1b) – a notion which is likewise missing in Paul.

5.5. Plausible reasons for the three major differences

5.5.1. The paradox of divine power in human weakness

It is evident from his letters that Paul experienced exceptionally great hardships (e.g., 2 *Cor* 4:7-12; 11:23-33; 12:7; 2 *Tim* 2:9-10). While he was opposed by Greco-Roman society (e.g., *Ac* 19:23-41; see section 2.2.1.4.), he suffered especially from fierce ongoing persecution at the hands of his fellow Jews (e.g., *Ac* 13:50; 14:2; 17:5, 13; 21:27, 30-36; 23:12-15; see section 2.2.1.3.). All these hardships – and particularly the countless beatings and the stoning (2 *Cor* 11:23b-25a), undoubtedly left Paul with

⁹⁶ Since Ignatius nowhere exhorts his readers to follow his path to martyrdom (see end of section 3.4.3.), nor does he apply this principle to anyone else besides him.

numerous scars. These marks must have been readily visible to those around him, so that it was no secret that he was an afflicted individual. Since these scars were derived from corporal punishment, they were generally viewed by Greco-Roman society rather negatively – as something shameful and humiliating (Glancy 2004:107).

It seems that this negative perception of his weaknesses was most problematic in the competitive Corinthian environment, which revolved around prestige, status and outward appearances (DeSilva 2009:556-557): it was in this city that Paul and his affliction-filled-ministry were severely attacked and undermined (e.g., 2 Cor 10:2, 10; 11:5-6; 12:16). If he wanted to restore his reputation and salvage what he had already invested in the Corinthians he needed to defend his weaknesses and correct the Corinthians' faulty perspective on these weaknesses (as well as on human weakness in general) by revealing to them God's perspective on that issue⁹⁷. This is exactly what Paul did: he presented an apology of his weaknesses and it was through the presentation of the paradox of divine power in human weakness that he was able to accomplish this feat.

In contrast, based on the content of their epistles (and partly due to the somewhat decreasing Jewish persecution after the church's first few decades; see section 3.2.1.1.), it is highly unlikely that the Apostolic Fathers, at the time of their letter-writing, had experienced hardships to the large extent Paul had⁹⁸. In addition, they did not minister in the competitive Corinthian environment and they seem not to have been accused and subjected to criticism as Paul was. Consequently, it appears that the Apostolic Fathers did not need to present an apology of their weaknesses and the paradox of divine power in human weakness thus only plays a minor role in their letters.

⁹⁷ In fact, 31 out of the 36 verses where Paul writes about the paradox of divine power in human weakness occur in 2 Corinthians (1:8-10; 4:8-11; 6:9-10; 11:23-12:10; 13:4).

⁹⁸ Although the Apostolic Fathers undoubtedly did suffer from unofficial persecution from Greco-Roman society and had to live with the ever-present danger of being formally charged and convicted in a Roman court (see section 3.2.1.2.). Moreover, Ignatius was evidently bound and suffered much from the Roman soldiers (Ign. *Rom.* 5:1).

5.5.2. Suffering working together for the believer's good

I have just noted above that in 2 Corinthians Paul primarily defended his weaknesses by presenting the paradox of divine power in human weakness. Another way Paul was able to defend his weaknesses was by demonstrating, mostly with practical examples from his life, that these weaknesses actually worked together for his good – that they benefited him in various ways. This is confirmed by the fact that this principle, although it is explicitly stated only in Romans 8:28, is, however, most clearly and repeatedly illustrated throughout 2 Corinthians (1:4-5, 9; 4:17; 12:7, 9-10).

Because the Apostolic Fathers (1) were not as greatly characterised by hardships as Paul was, (2) seem not to have been judged and criticised on account of such experienced hardships, as was the case with Paul, and (3) therefore, in contrast to Paul, did not have to defend their weaknesses (see the previous section), they likewise seem to have had no need to clarify to their readers that their suffering worked together for their good. In other words, it is because the paradox of divine power in human weakness is featured only minimally in the Apostolic Fathers that the principle of suffering working together for the believer's good is likewise almost lacking.

5.5.3. Martyrdom as the way to true discipleship

When Ignatius wrote his letters, he was on his way to Rome for trial – bound and guarded by Roman soldiers (Ign. *Rom.* 5:1). Since by that time a person's profession of being a Christian was considered a punishable offence if one was formally charged in a Roman court (Williams 2012:179), Ignatius could expect to be sentenced to death in Rome. In addition, he had a strong desire to die for various reasons (see end of section 3.3.2.3.) and he regarded his death as the greater need for his readers than to remain alive (see section 5.5.4.). As a result, Ignatius believed that it was God's will for him to be martyred and he consequently viewed his death as the absolutely necessary path for himself. Because his death, which was to be expected and which he believed to be God's plan for him, benefited the church and himself in various ways, it seems that Ignatius in part employed the idea of true discipleship through martyrdom as a rhetorical device to persuade his readers to allow him to die (and thus become a “true disciple”).

In contrast, Paul generally expected *not* to die a martyr's death in Rome, but to be released, so that he could continue his apostolic labours (Phil 1:24-26). Since he apparently believed that it was God's will for him to stay alive, Paul, unlike Ignatius, did not need to persuade his readers to allow him to die and thus he did not need to employ the discussed notion as a rhetorical device to achieve this goal.

As noted several times before, the notion of true discipleship through martyrdom seems to be closely related to the idea of Ignatius being able to demonstrate, through his sacrificial death, his faithfulness as a Christian (and thus being able to validate his former episcopal ministry, which was one important reason why he desired to die; see end of section 3.3.2.3.) In addition, Ignatius, who was trying to follow in Paul's footsteps as closely as possible (Ign. *Eph.* 12:2), seems to also have, for the sake of the church, desired to gain greater authority and influence through his martyrdom (Bird and Dodson 2011:57) – an idea which appears to likewise play a role in the notion under discussion.

Paul, however, did not need to demonstrate his faithfulness as a Christian, nor did he need to gain more authority, since he was already an apostle and, in addition, was already widely known and influential. Paul therefore did not need to accomplish what Ignatius aimed to accomplish by writing that he would only be a true disciple once he had been martyred, and hence, the idea is lacking in Paul's letters.

5.6. Other differences between the two theologies of suffering

5.6.1. Suffering on account of Christ

In contrast to Paul, Ignatius and Polycarp, who employ the prepositions 'ἐν', 'διὰ', 'ὑπὲρ' and 'ἕνεκεν' to convey the idea of suffering *on account of* Christ (see section 5.5.1.), Clement never explicitly refers to suffering as occurring for this reason. This idea is, however, implied in 1 Clement 5:2-6:2 and 45:3-7a. In addition, while in Paul the most predominantly used preposition to convey the idea of suffering on account of Christ is the preposition 'ὑπὲρ' (3x; 2 Cor 12:10; Phil 1:29), in the Apostolic Fathers it is the preposition 'ἐν' (5x; Ign. *Eph.* 3:1; 11:2; Ign. *Rom.* 1:1; Ign. *Phld.* 5:1; 7:2). Furthermore, the latter employ one preposition, which the former never employs: the preposition 'εἰς' (1x; Ign. *Eph.* 12:2a).

5.6.2. Suffering as completing Christ's afflictions

While Paul devotes one verse (Col 1:24) to the idea that his suffering fills up Christ's afflictions (in that through his affliction-filled-ministry he continues Christ's work of spreading the gospel and thus completes, in a representational sense, Christ's afflictions; see section 2.4.2.), this idea is absent in the Apostolic Fathers.

5.6.3. Suffering as a normal component of the believer's life and thus a demonstration of his Christianity

While both Paul and the Apostolic Fathers reveal that the life of every believer is naturally characterised by suffering and opposition (see section 5.2.1.), Paul, as is evident from Philippians 1:29, 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 and 2 Timothy 3:12, explains this idea in a more straightforward manner than the Apostolic Fathers do – in whose writings this idea is more often implied (*1 Clem.* 45:3-7a; *Ign. Magn.* 8:2a; *Ign. Rom.* 3:3b; *Ign. Smyrn.* 11:1a; *Pol. Phil* 1:1) than explicitly stated (*1 Clem.* 22:7; *Ign. Magn.* 5:2b; *Ign. Smyrn.* 4:2). In addition, Paul and Ignatius each features some unique emphasis regarding this issue: Paul clarifies that suffering is not just the by-product of the believer's faith, which has been graciously given (ἐχαρίσθη) to him by God, but his suffering on account of Christ is itself a gracious gift from God as well (Phil 1:29). And Ignatius stresses that for the believer suffering is in fact a necessity and that he must willingly welcome and embrace it (*Magn.* 5:2b).

Finally, it is Ignatius who takes this idea of the believer being naturally characterised by suffering a step further and repeatedly argues that the believer's suffering therefore demonstrates that he is indeed a Christian (*Ign. Magn.* 9:1b; *Ign. Rom.* 2:1b; 3:2; *Ign. Pol.* 7:1b) and that he has been faithful (*Ign. Rom.* 3:2; 4:1b). This notion of the believer's suffering constituting a proof of his Christianity and faithfulness never appears in Paul's letters.

5.6.4. Death as a preferable option

While Paul and Ignatius both imply that for the believer death is in reality preferable to life by expressing their desire to die and be with Christ (Clement and Polycarp never do so in their letters), Ignatius expresses this desire much more frequently: while Paul states this desire twice (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23b), Ignatius does so in sixteen

verses (*Trall.* 4:2a; 12:2a; *Rom.* 1:1-2:2; 4:1-2; 5:2-6:3; 7:2; 8:3; *Smyrn.* 11:1b). In addition, although Paul is quite emphatic in showing that to die is a far better option (πολλῶ γὰρ μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον) than to keep living (Phil 1:23b), Ignatius is much more emphatic in expressing his desire to die, in that he (1) even longs for and graphically describes the gruesome elements involved in his martyrdom (*Rom.* 5:3b), (2) associates the wild beasts with pleasure, (3) displays a sense of impatience by his repeated emphasis on swiftness, (4) will even take forceful action in order to ensure that the wild beasts will devour him (*Rom.* 5:2) and (5) begs the Romans not to hinder him from being martyred (e.g., *Rom.* 1:2-2:2; 4:1-2; 6:2-3).

However, the biggest difference between Paul's and Ignatius' desire to die is that while the former recognizes the need to stay alive (being therefore confident that he will continue his earthly labour; Phil 1:24-26), the latter lacks such a perspective and his only goal is to die a martyr's death (for his reasons see end of section 3.3.2.3.) – although he does ultimately submit his fate to God's will for him (*Rom.* 1:1b). While Paul considers his life to be the greater need for his readers, Ignatius regards his death as the greater need for his readers. Thus, while Paul, who presents his uncertain future as a win-win situation (Phil 1:20b-26), is caught between two strong desires (v. 23a), Ignatius only desires his martyrdom, interpreting the possibility of being spared as a great failure (*Rom.* 2:1b; 8:3).

Finally, while Paul seems to have had only the one primary reason in mind for his desire to die (i.e., to be with Jesus; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23b), Ignatius also had several secondary reasons in mind (see end of section 3.3.2.3.).

5.6.5. Suffering as an evidence of Jesus' humanity

For Ignatius the believer's suffering serves as a direct evidence of the true suffering of Christ and consequently of his humanity (*Trall.* 10:1; *Smyrn.* 4:2a; 5:1). In Paul's letters this idea is absent. Although in 1 Corinthians 15:29b-32 Paul likewise uses his suffering to further his argument and establish the reality of one important aspect of Jesus' life, this aspect differs from the one Ignatius highlights: while for Ignatius his suffering constitutes proof of Jesus' humanity, Paul argues that his suffering constitutes proof of Jesus' resurrection.

5.6.6. Suffering for the benefit of others/the church

Paul and Ignatius have a different understanding of the primary benefits of their suffering for their readers/the church: Paul holds that through his suffering his readers primarily gain comfort, as well as salvation (in that his affliction-filled-ministry results in numerous conversions and the up-building of believers; 2 Cor 1:6-7; 4:10-12, 15), and Ignatius considers his suffering to primarily serve, among other possible benefits, as (1) a proof of his devotion for his readers, (2) a representation for them of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, and (3) an example for them to imitate (see section 3.4.6.)⁹⁹. In addition, Paul and Ignatius select different ways to convey the idea that they are suffering for the benefit of their readers: while Paul frequently uses a preposition, namely, ὑπὲρ (2 Cor 1:6; 12:15; Eph 3:1, 13; Col 1:24) and διὰ (2 Tim 2:10), Ignatius repeatedly notes that he and his chains are a ransom (ἀντίψυχον) on behalf of his readers (*Eph.* 21:1a; *Smyrn.* 10:2a; *Pol.* 2:3b; 6:1).

While Paul and Ignatius write about how their own personal suffering benefits their readers, Clement broadens the topic and writes about how the suffering of Gentiles in general (it is likely that Clement has first and foremost Gentile *believers* in mind) can potentially benefit others (*1 Clem.* 55:1-2). In addition, while Paul's concern revolves around the benefit of the church, Clement has in mind the benefit of other people in general (believers and unbelievers alike). And lastly, while Paul's and Ignatius' benefits for their readers are predominantly of a spiritual nature, the benefits of suffering in 1 Clement 55:1-2 are exclusively of a physical nature (note that Clement presents three very specific ways in which the person's suffering can physically benefit others: keeping the person alive, free or fed).

5.6.7. Suffering as an opportunity to experience God's comfort

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul demonstrates that suffering in fact presents an opportunity to the believer to experience God's constant comfort (2 Cor 1:3-7; 7:4-7;

⁹⁹ It is likely that some of these three benefits were to some extent in Paul's mind as well – especially the third benefit (as Greco-Roman letter writers frequently mentioned their own suffering as an inspiring example for their readers to follow; see section 2.2.1.5.; e.g., 1 Thess 2:1-16) and to some degree the first one as well (as the Greco-Roman author's references to his suffering for his readers often served as a demonstration of his friendship; see section 2.2.1.5.; e.g. 2 Cor 1:4-7). However, the explicitly stated benefits of Paul's suffering for his readers (2 Cor 1:6) are nowhere found in Ignatius' letters.

13). While Paul teaches his readers several truths about the believer's comfort in relation to his suffering, this topic is absent in the Apostolic Fathers.

5.6.8. Suffering produces eternal benefits for the believer

Paul, Ignatius and Polycarp hold that *through the present hardships* the believer will ultimately (and entirely by God's grace) receive certain eternal benefits/future rewards. However, this idea, while it is explicitly stated in Paul (Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:17; Phil 3:10-11; 2 Tim 2:12), is merely implied in the Apostolic Fathers (Ign. *Eph.* 11:2; Pol. *Phil* 1:1b; 2:3b). For instance, the term 'producing' (κατεργάζεται), which conveys this idea most clearly, only appears in Paul (2 Cor 4:17).

In regard to the believer's eternal benefits that are produced through his suffering, Paul and the Apostolic Fathers feature different elements – those in Paul are more specific than those in the Apostolic Fathers: Paul explicitly notes that the believer's suffering will ultimately be followed by (1) his resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:10-11), (2) his sharing in Christ's glory (Rom 8:17; 2 Cor 4:17) and (3) his reigning with Christ in heaven (2 Tim 2:12). In contrast, the elements implied in the Apostolic Fathers are more general: the believer's suffering produces in him (1) spiritual wealth (Ign. *Eph.* 11:2; Pol. *Phil* 1:1b) and (2) an eternal reward, namely, the possession of God's kingdom (Pol. *Phil* 2:3b). Although the eternal benefits in Paul are more specific than those noted in the Apostolic Fathers, the two groups are not so different, as the former are merely more specific applications of the latter.

5.6.9. Suffering and martyrdom as a privilege

The strong implication that for the believer suffering and martyrdom is a privilege occurs much more often in the Apostolic Fathers (Ign. *Eph.* 11:2; Ign. *Trall.* 4:2a; 12:3b; Ign. *Rom.* 1:1b; 2:2; Pol. *Phil* 1:1b; 2:3b) than in Paul (Phil 1:29). Moreover, Ignatius repeatedly includes more specific references to *martyrdom in particular* as a privilege (thus placing special emphasis on martyrdom; *Trall.* 4:2a; 12:3b; *Rom.* 1:1b; 2:2¹⁰⁰), but Paul does not. He is content to simply imply in Philippians 1:29 that for

¹⁰⁰ In each of these four verses Ignatius reveals that in order to attain his martyrdom he must be worthy to receive it. And because his martyrdom requires worthiness it is therefore, by implication, a privilege.

the believer *suffering in general* is a privilege (although, of course, martyrdom may as well be included in this more general reference to suffering).

5.6.10. Future hope in suffering

This topic features much more extensively in Paul and Ignatius than in Clement and Polycarp. While I have earlier noted several commonalities between Paul and Ignatius on this topic (see section 5.2.3.), the two authors also differ in some significant respects, that is, Paul includes several elements that are absent in Ignatius' letters (as well as in those of Clement and Polycarp): Paul writes about (1) the believer's ultimate deliverance from all of his present troubles (Phil 1:18b-19; 2 Thess 1:7; 2 Tim 4:18a), (2) the full realization of his adoption as God's son (Rom 8:23), (3) the redemption of his body¹⁰¹ (Rom 8:23), and (4) his reigning with Jesus in heaven¹⁰² (2 Tim 2:12). In addition, while both Paul and Ignatius write about the believer's being raised/resurrected, the former puts special emphasis on the fact that this resurrection occurs *with Jesus* (in that the believer shares in Jesus' resurrection; 2 Cor 4:14) and the latter emphasises that the believer will be *free in Jesus* when rising up to heaven (no longer bound or oppressed in any way; *Rom.* 4:3).

Paul, unlike the Apostolic Fathers, puts the believer's present suffering into (eternal) perspective, noting that in light of the exceedingly great and eternal future glory that awaits the believer in heaven his suffering is slight and momentary, and, since it is so small and insignificant, it is not even worthy to be compared with that glory (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17-18).

Paul and the Apostolic Fathers variously express the notion that the enduring believer will receive a future reward in heaven (e.g., Rom 8:17-18; 2 Tim 4:18a; 1 *Clem.* 45:8; *Pol. Phil* 2:3b; 9:2). However, when writing about this idea the Apostolic

¹⁰¹ Although this idea of the future redemption of the believer's body shares some similarities to the previously noted commonality between Paul and Ignatius of the believer enjoying incorruptibility and eternal life (2 Cor 5:1-4; *Ign. Pol.* 2:3; see section 5.2.3.), it is, however, different. While the former refers to a specific process that will take place when the believer goes to heaven, the latter will be the result of that completed process.

¹⁰² However, this notion might be loosely implied in Polycarp's *Philippians* 2:3b, which states that the believers who are poor and persecuted on account of their faith are blessed, for God's kingdom belongs to them.

Fathers, but not Paul, occasionally include the terms 'βραβεῖον' (*1 Clem.* 5:5), 'γέρας' (*1 Clem.* 6:2b), 'ἄμοιβή' (*Ign. Smyrn.* 9:2b) and 'θέμα' (*Ign. Pol.* 2:3) – all of which can be translated as 'prize' or 'reward', in order to clearly present and emphasise the fact that the believer's patient endurance will be rewarded with a great prize in heaven. In addition, Clement and Polycarp each include one aspect in their letters regarding this future reward, which is absent in Paul: while Clement notes that the suffering believer's name will be recorded by God in heaven and thus his faithful deeds will be remembered for all eternity (*1 Clem.* 45:8), Polycarp writes that the suffering believers are blessed, for God's kingdom belongs to them (*Phil* 2:3b).

In regard to the believer's more immediate future hope, which occasionally features in Paul and Clement (but is absent in Ignatius and Polycarp), the apostle includes one aspect that is missing in Clement's epistle: the suffering believer has hope because he knows that although his physical body is wasting away, his inner spiritual being is continuously renewed (*2 Cor* 4:16). On the other hand, Clement includes several aspects that are missing or merely implied in Paul's letters: for Clement the suffering believer can have hope in regard to his more immediate future because (1) he can be assured that God hears and acts upon his cries (*1 Clem.* 22:7-8; this idea is loosely implied in *2 Cor* 1:11), (2) God will arise and deal boldly with him, placing him in safety (*1 Clem.* 15:6-7), and (3) God fights on his behalf, watching over him and keeping him safe – often physically, but always spiritually (so that ultimately he will safely reach salvation in heaven; *1 Clem.* 45:7b).

5.6.11. The believer's appropriate response to suffering

While Paul and the Apostolic Fathers agree on what the believer's most important response to his suffering is (i.e., to patiently endure it; see section 5.2.4.), they write about different and thus unique secondary responses: Paul repeatedly, and often by implication, notes that the believer must rejoice in suffering (*Phil* 1:18; 2:17-18; 4:4; *1 Thess* 5:16), be content in it (*2 Cor* 12:10; *Phil* 4:11-13), give thanks to God (*1 Thess* 5:18) and rely on him (*2 Cor* 1:9b). On the other hand, Ignatius implies that an afflicted believer ought to call out to Jesus (*Smyrn.* 4:2; note, however, that the responses of relying on God (Paul) and calling out to him (Ignatius) are similar).

In the writings of Ignatius and Polycarp it occasionally becomes evident that believers

ought to imitate Jesus' own example of patient endurance (Ign. *Eph.* 10:3; Ign. *Rom.* 6:3a; Pol. *Phil* 8:2). Moreover, Polycarp provides his readers with additional examples of patient endurance to be followed (*Phil* 9:1-2), and Clement provides several recent examples (*1 Clem.* 5:4-6:2), as well as more ancient examples (*1 Clem.* 45:4-7a), of people who have patiently endured, and who, by implication, must be imitated. In contrast, such examples of patient endurance to be imitated are much rarer in Paul. He does, however, supply his own examples, which, by implication, his readers must follow (e.g., 2 Cor 1:3-11; Phil 1:18b-24), as well as the example of Jesus, which must be imitated (Phil 2:5-11) – although the latter two are more examples of humility than of endurance per se.

Polycarp provides different reasons (or motivating factors) why believers must endure their suffering: primarily out of gratitude for what Jesus has endured for them (*Phil* 8:2-9:2), but also out of obedience to his word (9:1) and love for him (9:2). In contrast, Paul does not explicitly supply his readers with any reasons why they must endure. But his repeated references to the various benefits and good purposes of suffering seem to constitute one major reason Paul has in mind why the believer must endure such suffering and rejoice in the midst of it.

5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I have compared the theology of suffering of Paul with the one of the Apostolic Fathers. I have discussed eleven shared topics and various common details within these topics, and I have written about fifteen topics that vary – either in detail or in big picture (i.e., when some topic as a whole features in one theology of suffering, but is absent in the other). It has become evident that while the two theologies of suffering have various differences, these differences are outweighed by the numerous and more significant commonalities.

It has been shown that the two theologies of suffering share four major common topics: (1) suffering as a normal component of the believer's life, (2) his suffering benefiting others/the church in different (but primarily spiritual) ways, (3) his future hope in the midst of such suffering, and (4) his appropriate response to suffering, which consists, first and foremost, of patient endurance. The believer's future hope in

suffering is, overall, the most repeated common theme in Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering. At a time where believers underwent opposition and persecution from the Jewish religious leaders, Greco-Roman society and at times the Roman government, the four major commonalities noted above were evidently the most important issues to be communicated by the four authors. It was important for the believers to be reminded that their struggles were part of what God had called them to, that they could have great hope for the future, that their suffering could benefit others and that for these reasons they needed to respond to their suffering appropriately – primarily by enduring these hardships faithfully.

It has also been revealed that the three most significant differences between the two theologies of suffering are (1) the paradox of divine power in human weakness, which features frequently in Paul's letters, but appears only minimally in the Apostolic Fathers, (2) the theme of suffering working together for the believer's good, which likewise repeatedly occurs in Paul's letters, but only sparingly in the Apostolic Fathers, and (3) the idea that martyrdom is the way to true discipleship, which is repeated in Ignatius' letters, but entirely lacking in Paul's. The plausible reasons for these three major differences are, on the one hand, the seeming lack of need of the Apostolic Fathers to defend their weaknesses to their readers. Thus, unlike Paul, they had no need to repeatedly present the paradox of divine power in human weakness, nor did they need to clarify to their readers that their suffering worked together for their own good – both of which served in Paul's letters as a means through which he could successfully defend his weaknesses. On the other hand, it seems that Paul did not need to employ the notion of true discipleship through martyrdom, since he, unlike Ignatius, did not need to persuade his readers to allow him to die, nor did he need to demonstrate his faithfulness as a Christian, nor desire to gain more authority through his death.

It has thus become clear that the reason why Paul's theology of suffering varies in numerous respects from the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering is the fact that their own situations differed, as well as the situations of their readers, and thus they had different purposes for writing their letters and frequently needed to employ different features when writing about the believer's suffering.

Finally, the comparison between the two theologies of suffering has revealed that although the authors were certainly aware of the difficulties and challenges which the believer's suffering presents, they nevertheless displayed a thoroughly positive attitude towards such suffering, in that they repeatedly pointed out the various benefits of the believer's suffering for himself (working together for his good), as well as for the church, and frequently revealed, implicitly and explicitly, that in fact the believer's suffering is a blessing and a privilege. Such a positive perspective on suffering must have greatly encouraged their readers in the midst of their own struggles, made them hopeful and inspired them to faithfully endure.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1. Review of the research

The primary objective of this research paper was to discover in what ways the theology of suffering of the Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp) corresponds and differs from Paul's theology of suffering. In order to accomplish this primary objective the paper has aimed to achieve four secondary objectives, namely, (1) to establish, through an exegetical study, a Pauline theology of suffering, (2) to discover, through an exegetical study, the various features of the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering, (3) to deduce the strengths and perceived weaknesses of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering, and (4) to compare the two theologies of suffering in order to discover their commonalities and differences. Each of these four secondary objectives has been realized in a separate chapter.

The hypothesis in the introduction has claimed that the believer's future hope is the most extensively shared element in Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering. In addition, it has been argued that the two biggest differences between the two theologies are (1) the Pauline theme of 'power in weakness', which is barely featured in the Apostolic Fathers, and (2) the repeated Ignatian notion of becoming a better disciple through martyrdom, which is entirely lacking in Paul's letters.

6.2. Paul's theology of suffering

The second chapter of this paper has established a Pauline theology of suffering. The chapter has researched several issues regarding the historical-cultural background of this theology, conducted an exegetical study on four key Pauline passages on the topic (2 Cor 1:3-11; 4:7-18; 12:1-10; Phil 1:18b-24) and carried out a survey on the remaining relevant texts. It has become evident that Paul devoted much space to issues related to the believers' suffering and that he usually viewed their suffering, which typically resulted from Jewish and Greco-Roman persecution and opposition, as occurring on account of their commitment to Christ.

It has also been shown that according to Paul suffering constitutes a normal component of the life of *every* believer, since faith never comes without suffering, but is always accompanied by it. However, such suffering *because of Christ* and *in union with* him is in reality a privilege that has been graciously granted to the believer by God, for it ultimately works together for his good in that he gains various benefits through it, such as the following three benefits that Paul emphasises. First, suffering presents an opportunity to the believer to rely not on his own limited strength, but on God's perfect strength. Consequently, it is also an opportunity to experience divine power, which is, paradoxically, perfected in human weakness (which includes suffering). It is when the believer is weak that in fact he is strong, for God then supplies the power he lacks. This divine power can come in different forms, such as the believer being completely delivered by God or "merely" being preserved and strengthened by him. Second, since God comforts the downcast, suffering presents an opportunity to the believer to experience God's constant and joyous comfort. And third, the believer's suffering, which is not meritorious, produces for him eternal benefits – it is because he suffers that, by God's grace, he will ultimately also be resurrected from the dead, share in Christ's glory and reign with him in heaven.

Moreover, it has become clear that according to Paul suffering not only brings benefits to the believer himself, but also to the church as well. For instance, the divine power, which appears in the suffering believers (who are described as fragile clay jars), also has the purpose of clearly revealing that this power comes from God, therefore demonstrating the fact that Jesus is still alive and thus constituting part of

the gospel proclamation to unbelievers. Even the God-given comfort, which accompanies the believer's suffering, does not only benefit himself but others who are suffering as well, as the believer extends that God-given comfort to them. For these and other reasons Paul considers the church to gain eternal profit through his affliction-filled-ministry – through it many come to saving faith and many are spiritually built up.

Paul reveals that God sovereignly directs the experienced hardships to work together for the benefit of the believer, as well as for the benefit of the wider church. These hardships, which are part of God's good and loving purpose for the believer, are therefore shown to be neither pointless nor disadvantageous, but a blessing and frequently even a necessity. According to Paul believers must therefore, as the apostle himself has frequently demonstrated, not get discouraged, fearful and hopeless in the midst of their struggles, but respond to their suffering with patient endurance, genuine contentment and joy, as well as reliance on God. In regard to his own response to suffering Paul has also spent a good amount of time boasting in his weaknesses, in order to effectively defend his apostleship and correct the Corinthians' misconceptions concerning his sufferings.

The theme related to the believer's suffering that occurs most frequently in Paul's letters is the idea that in his ongoing struggles the believer has great hope for the future, as he can rest assured that his afflictions are slight and momentary in comparison to the eternal glory that is awaiting him in heaven. In addition, the believer can have hope because he knows that he will be resurrected and brought safely into God's glorious presence, where he will be freed from every affliction, be vindicated before him, be adopted as his son and reign with him forever.

6.3. The Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering

The third chapter has put forward a theology of suffering of the Apostolic Fathers. The chapter has shed light on some important issues regarding this theology's historical-cultural background, presented an exegetical study on four key passages on suffering in their letters (*1 Clem.* 45:7b-8; *Ign. Rom.* 5:1-3; *Ign. Smyrn.* 4:2; *Pol. Phil* 8:2-9:2) and conducted a survey on their other relevant texts. It has become

clear that the believer's suffering is a much-discussed topic in Ignatius' epistles and that it also features repeatedly in the writings of Clement and Polycarp – although to a much lesser degree. It has also been shown that when they write about the suffering of believers Ignatius and Polycarp usually have in mind their suffering due to their commitment to Christ. In Clement, however, this idea is merely implied at times.

The Apostolic Fathers hold that believers are naturally characterised by suffering, which, at their time, had resulted primarily from persecution and opposition from Greco-Roman society and occasionally the Roman government. It is Ignatius who notes that consequently the believer's suffering and patient endurance authenticate his claim of being a Christian and, in addition, demonstrate his faithfulness. Ignatius even takes a step further and argues that martyrdom, although it does not contribute to salvation, is the way to true discipleship in that the martyred believer not only resembles Christ and his disciples more closely, but actually himself becomes and is shown a true disciple. Therefore, and because it is the gateway to God's presence, Ignatius presents martyrdom as a *preferable* option for believers. However, for several sensible reasons he views martyrdom as the *absolutely necessary* path for himself.

Ignatius and Polycarp reveal that the believer's suffering on account of Christ is a privilege given by God's grace, for it results, on the one hand, in various blessings and benefits for the believer himself: it increases the believer's spiritual wealth and allows him to rise up free in Christ, enter into God's presence and inherit an eternal reward in heaven. Furthermore, it is through such suffering that, according to Ignatius, believers have been elected and united. On the other hand, the believer's suffering can also confer different benefits on others: Ignatius repeatedly reveals that his suffering and death are in some ways *for* his readers, and Clement shows that the believer's willing sacrificial suffering can potentially benefit others physically, by allowing them to stay alive, free or fed. The Apostolic Fathers thus repeatedly instruct their readers to endure their hardships patiently, imitating the examples that Jesus and various faithful believers have set before them. Polycarp clarifies that they must do so out of obedience, gratitude and love for Jesus, and urges his readers to also

glorify their Lord in the midst of their suffering.

The most prominent theme in the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering is the future hope of the believer in the midst of his hardships. The three authors emphasise that the believer's patient endurance will be rewarded with eternal life in heaven and the enjoyment of God's glorious presence. Because his captivity, suffering and death are the gateway to God's presence, Ignatius views these in thoroughly positive terms and goes so far as to even long for his martyrdom. In Clement the suffering believer's hope is extended to his more immediate future on earth, as God, who is sovereign and excellent, is stated to mercifully intervene and aid the struggling believers – by fighting for them, delivering them and keeping them safe (often physically but *always* spiritually).

6.4. An evaluation of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' understanding of suffering

In the fourth chapter I have briefly evaluated Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' understanding of suffering in light of the original readers' socio-historical background. I have identified and discussed several strengths and possible weaknesses of their theology of suffering, that is, I have described some aspects of their theology of suffering that would have had positive effects on their readers and other aspects that would possibly have affected them negatively.

I have demonstrated that Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering has seven significant strengths. They clarify that suffering is a normal component of the believer's life, that such suffering has numerous benefits and good purposes, that it is a blessing and must therefore be viewed positively, and that the believer has ample reason to have hope for the future in the midst of his hardships. In addition, they occasionally focus on the character of God, rather than on the experienced difficulties, provide numerous practical examples, which their readers can follow, and clarify what the believer's proper motivation must be for enduring his hardships. Through these seven positive features Paul and the Apostolic Fathers encouraged their readers to accept and even appreciate their own suffering, to be hopeful and humbly endure it.

I have also argued that Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering features three noteworthy possible weaknesses. First, in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Paul does not clarify the role of his readers – whether they are merely to receive Paul's comfort or whether they are given responsibility to comfort others with the same comfort they have received from him. Second, the Ignatian notion of martyrdom as the way to true discipleship has the potential to wrongly be interpreted by his readers in meritorious terms. And third, the Apostolic Fathers' focus on God's character in the context of Christian suffering does not feature frequently enough. As a result, the Corinthians may possibly have missed the fact that they were to comfort others in turn, some of the Romans may have come to view martyrdom as possessing merit, and some of the Apostolic Fathers' readers may have developed a perspective in their suffering that was too self-focused, rather than God-focused.

6.5. The two theologies of suffering in comparison

The fifth chapter has compared Paul's theology of suffering with that of the Apostolic Fathers and described the various commonalities and differences between them. More specifically, the chapter has discussed eleven shared topics, together with the numerous common details within these topics, as well as fifteen topics that vary – either as a whole or in certain details. It has become evident that although the two theologies of suffering have many features in common, they do, however, have more differences than commonalities, for even the common topics often include various significant differing details.

The chapter has pointed out the four most significant commonalities of the two theologies of suffering, as well as the three most important differences between them. Regarding the former, both Paul and the Apostolic Fathers write that (1) suffering is a normal component of the believer's life, (2) this suffering benefits the church in different (but primarily spiritual) ways, (3) it must therefore be patiently endured and (4) the believer always has hope for the future in the midst of these hardships. This last idea, which occurs in 43 verses in Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' writings, constitutes the most repeated common theme in their letters. These four major commonalities were evidently and reasonably the most important issues for Paul and the Apostolic Fathers to communicate to their readers, who experienced

continuous opposition and persecution from the Jewish religious leaders, Greco-Roman society and occasionally the Roman government.

It has been demonstrated that the three most important differences between the two theologies of suffering are (1) the paradox of divine power in human weakness, which occurs frequently in Paul's letters, but barely in the Apostolic Fathers, (2) the idea that the believer's suffering works together for his good, which likewise features repeatedly in Paul, but only sparingly in the Apostolic Fathers, and (3) the notion of true discipleship through martyrdom, which is repeated in Ignatius, but entirely absent in Paul. I have argued that the plausible reasons for these major differences are, firstly, the Apostolic Fathers' seeming lack of need, in contrast to Paul, to defend their weaknesses to their readers – as Paul employed the first two themes mentioned above as a means to accomplish this goal. And secondly, Paul had no need to persuade his readers to allow him to die, nor did he need to demonstrate his faithfulness as a Christian, nor desire to gain more authority through his death, as Ignatius did, who therefore presented the idea that true discipleship is attained through martyrdom.

It has thus become clear that the two theologies of suffering frequently vary (in both, their discussed topics and their details within these topics) because the situations of the authors differed, as well as the situations of their readers, so that they had different writing-purposes and, in addition, at times needed to employ differing, context-specific ideas that were relevant for their readers. However, it must be borne in mind that the numerous and more significant commonalities of the two theologies of suffering outweigh the differences.

6.6. Assessing the hypothesis

What I have stated in the hypothesis in the introduction of this paper has, throughout the last four chapters, and especially in the last one, been shown to be correct: it is indeed the believer's future hope that constitutes the most extensively shared feature in Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' theology of suffering. And it is true that the two biggest differences between these two theologies of suffering are (1) the Pauline theme of divine power in human weakness, which occurs only minimally in the

Apostolic Fathers, and (2) Ignatius' repeated idea of martyrdom as the way to true discipleship, which is entirely lacking in Paul.

However, I must make two modifications to my initial hypothesis. First, I believe that my understanding of this last theme mentioned above has improved, so that it is more appropriate to define it as 'becoming a true disciple through martyrdom' (as described throughout the last view chapters) than 'becoming a better disciple through martyrdom' (as written in the introduction's hypothesis statement). This is so because Ignatius does not employ terms expressing the idea of 'better' (e.g., κρείσσον) in connection to this theme and, in addition, such terms would lend themselves to express the notion of the believer's martyrdom possessing some merit – a notion that is, as has been shown throughout this paper, absent in Ignatius' letters.

And second, there is a third major difference between the two theologies of suffering that must be discussed together with the other two: Paul's repeated idea that the suffering of the believer works together for his good, which barely receives attention in the Apostolic Fathers. This idea is worth being highlighted with the other two major differences because, firstly, the two theologies of suffering do quite vastly differ in this respect, and secondly, because this idea is related to the other major differing theme of divine power in human weakness – as both of these themes are means through which Paul, in stark contrast to the Apostolic Fathers, defends his weaknesses.

Appendix

In order to trace the structure of Paul's and the Apostolic Fathers' argument in the eight passages under examination, the semantic relationships between each of their propositions are illustrated in the block diagrams below. The main propositions are placed against the left margin. While the coordinate propositions are aligned parallel, the subordinate propositions are indented to the right. Thus, the closer a proposition is placed to the left, the more prominent is its function in the passage (Smith 2009:49). While the first four texts are derived from the ESV, the last four texts are from Holmes' (2011:45-131) translation of the letters of the Apostolic Fathers.

Table 1: Propositions in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

3-4a	Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction,	HEAD
4b	so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction,	Ground
4c	with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.	Manner
5a	For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings,	Comparison
5b	so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.	Manner
6a	If we are afflicted,	Condition
6b	it is for your comfort and salvation;	Purpose
6c	and if we are comforted,	Condition
6d	it is for your comfort,	Purpose
6e	which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.	Temporal
7a	Our hope for you is unshaken,	HEAD
7b	for we know that as you share in our sufferings,	Comparison

7c	you will also share in our comfort.	Ground
8a	For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.	HEAD
8b	For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength	Ground
8c	that we despaired of life itself.	Result
9a	Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.	Progression
9b	But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.	Purpose
10a	He delivered us from such a deadly peril,	HEAD
10b	and he will deliver us.	Series
10c	On him we have set our hope	HEAD
10d	that he will deliver us again.	Explanation
11a	You also must help us by prayer,	HEAD
11b	so that many will give thanks on our behalf	Purpose
11c	for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.	Explanation

Table 2: Propositions in 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

7a	But we have this treasure in jars of clay,	HEAD (Explanation)
7b	to show that the surpassing power belongs to God	Purpose
7c	and not to us.	Series
8a	We are afflicted in every way,	Illustration
8b	but not crushed;	Negative
8c	perplexed,	Illustration
8d	but not driven to despair;	Negative
9a	persecuted,	Illustration
9b	but not forsaken;	Negative
9c	struck down,	Illustration
9d	but not destroyed;	Negative
10a	always carrying in the body the death of Jesus,	Illustration
10b	so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.	Purpose
11a	For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake,	Progression
11b	so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.	Purpose

12a	So death is at work in us,	Result
12b	but life in you.	Contrast
13a	Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke,"	Ground
13b	we also believe,	HEAD
13c	and so we also speak,	Inference
14a	knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus	Progression
14b	and bring us with you into his presence.	Series
15a	For it is all for your sake,	Ground
15b	so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving,	Purpose
15c	to the glory of God.	Explanation
16a	So we do not lose heart.	HEAD (Inference)
16b	Though our outer nature is wasting away,	Concessive
16c	our inner nature is being renewed day by day.	HEAD
17	For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,	Ground
18a	as we look not to the things that are seen	Negative
18b	but to the things that are unseen.	Positive
18c	For the things that are seen are transient,	Ground
18d	but the things that are unseen are eternal.	Contrast

Table 3: Propositions in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

1a	I must go on boasting.	HEAD
1b	Though there is nothing to be gained by it,	Concessive
1c	I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.	Explanation
2a	I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven –	Explanation
2b	whether in the body or out of the body I do not know,	Negative
2c	God knows.	Positive
3a	And I know that this man was caught up into paradise –	Repetition
3b	whether in the body or out of the body I do not know,	Negative
3c	God knows –	Positive
4a	and he heard things that cannot be told,	Series

4b	which man may not utter.	Explanation
5a	On behalf of this man I will boast,	HEAD (Positive)
5b	but on my own behalf I will not boast,	Negative
5c	except of my weaknesses.	Conditional
6a	Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool,	Conditional
6b	for I would be speaking the truth.	Ground
6c	But I refrain from doing it,	Contrast
6d	so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.	Purpose
7a	So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations,	Purpose
7b	a thorn was given me in the flesh,	HEAD
7c	a messenger of Satan to harass me,	Purpose
7d	to keep me from being too elated.	Purpose
8	Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.	HEAD
9a	But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,	Response
9b	for my power is made perfect in weakness."	Explanation
9c	Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses,	Result
9d	so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.	Purpose
10a	For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.	Result
10b	For when I am weak, then I am strong.	Ground (Temporal)

Table 4: Propositions in Philippians 1:18b-24

18b	Yes, and I will rejoice,	HEAD
19	for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,	Ground
20a	as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed,	Negative
20b	but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body,	Positive
20c	whether by life or by death.	Conditional
21a	For to me to live is Christ,	HEAD
21b	and to die is gain.	Series

22a	If I am to live in the flesh,	Conditional
22b	that means fruitful labor for me.	Explanation
22c	Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.	HEAD
23a	I am hard pressed between the two.	Progression
23b	My desire is to depart and be with Christ,	Explanation
23c	for that is far better.	Ground
24	But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.	Alternative

Table 5: Propositions in 1 Clement 45:7b-8

7b	they did not realize that the Most High is the champion and protector of those who with a pure conscience worship his excellent name.	HEAD
7c	To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.	Result
8a	But those who patiently endured with confidence inherited glory and honor;	Contrast
8b	they were exalted	Series
8c	and had their names recorded by God as their memorial for ever and ever. Amen.	Series

Table 6: Propositions in Romans 5:1-3

1a	From Syria all the way to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, on land and sea, by night and day,	HEAD
1b	chained amidst ten leopards (that is, a company of soldiers) who only get worse when they are well treated.	Explanation
1c	Yet because of their mistreatment I am becoming more of a disciple;	Contrast (Ground)
1d	nevertheless I am not thereby justified.	Concessive
2a	May I have the pleasure of the wild beasts that have been prepared for me;	HEAD
2b	and I pray that they prove to be prompt with me.	Progression
2c	I will even coax them to devour me quickly,	Progression
2d	not as they have done with some, whom they were too timid to touch.	Negative (Comparison)
2e	And if when I am willing and ready they are not,	Conditional
2f	I will force them.	Progression
3a	Bear with me –	HEAD
3b	I know what is best for me.	Ground

3c	Now at last I am beginning to be a disciple.	Explanation
3d	May nothing visible or invisible envy me,	HEAD
3e	so that I may reach Jesus Christ.	Result
3f	Fire and cross and battles with wild beasts, mutilation, mangling, wrenching of bones, the hacking of limbs, the crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil – let these come upon me,	Progression
3g	only let me reach Jesus Christ!	Result

Table 7: Propositions in Smyrnaeans 4:2

2a	For if these things were done by our Lord in appearance only,	Condition
2b	then I am in chains in appearance only.	HEAD
2c	Why, moreover, have I surrendered myself to death, to fire, to sword, to beasts?	Question
2d	But in any case, “near the sword” means “near to God”;	Answer
2e	“with the beasts” means “with God.”	Series
2f	Only let it be in the name of Jesus Christ,	Explanation
2g	so that I may suffer together with him!	Purpose
2h	I endure everything	HEAD
2i	because he himself, who is the perfect human being, empowers me.	Ground

Table 8: Propositions in Philippians 8:2-9:2

8:2a	Let us, therefore, become imitators of his patient endurance,	Inference
8:2b	and if we should suffer for the sake of his name,	Conditional
8:2c	let us glorify him.	Series
8:2d	For this is the example he set for us in his own person,	Ground (Bilateral)
8:2e	and this is what we have believed.	Series
9:1a	I urge all of you, therefore, to obey the teaching about righteousness	Inference
9:1b	and to exercise unlimited endurance,	Series
9:1c	like that which you saw with your own eyes not only in the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus	Comparison
9:1d	but also in others from your congregation	Contrast
9:1e	and in Paul himself	Series

9:1f	and the rest of the apostles.	Series
9:2a	Be assured that all these did not run in vain	Explanation (Negative)
9:2b	but with faith and righteousness,	Contrast (Positive)
9:2c	and that they are now in the place due them with the Lord,	Series
9:2d	with whom they also suffered.	Explanation
9:2e	For they did not love the present world	Ground (Negative)
9:2f	but the one who died on our behalf	Contrast (Positive)
9:2g	and was raised by God for our sakes.	Series

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