

## **“Comfort” Greek “paramutheomai-paramuthia-paramuthion”**

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**Introduction:** At the start of each lesson we want to remind you of the ministry of “comfort.” The English word “comfort” is the “anchor word” we are using in our series. Our English word “comfort” comes from two Latin words, “cum” in Latin meaning “with” and “fortis” in Latin meaning “fortification, fortress, or fortify.” One commentator stated the English word “comfort” literally means a “strengthened-wither” or more understandably “someone who is with you giving strength.”<sup>1</sup>

We are going to explore other words that although not translated “comfort,” can give “comfort” by their very nature, meaning and usage.

### **1. Word Usage in Language/Translations**

#### **A. Forms used (Greek)**

This word “paramuthia” comes from two Greek words, “para” which means “with” and “muthia” which means “to speak.” This word for “comfort” means “to speak with” implying “a conversation of encouragement, a gentle influence by words.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **B. Times used**

This word for comfort is used 6xs in the Greek New Testament in its various Greek forms: “paramutheomai” is used 4xs; “paramuthia” is used 1xs; and “paramuthion” is used 1xs.<sup>3</sup>

#### **C. Ways used (translated)**

This word is translated into English in only one way:

“paramutheomai” translated “comfort” used 4xs, John 11:19; 11:31; 1 Thess. 2:11; 5:14

“paramuthia” translated “comfort” used 1xs, 1 Cor. 14:3

“paramuthion” translated “comfort” used 1xs, Phil. 2:1<sup>4</sup>

### **2. Word Usage in History**

#### **A. Classic writing**

In classical Greek literature, this word “...has the more general meaning of “to speak to someone in a positive, benevolent way,” ...but it also means to encourage or exhort, ...and to comfort, soothe, address cheering word to.” An example is from a letter that said, “the others too I would kindly exhort to sail home.”<sup>5</sup> “The basic sense of this verb in classic Greek was ‘to speak to someone in a friendly way.’ The noun meant ‘encouragement, consolation, and exhortation.’”<sup>6</sup>

#### **B. Septuagint writing**

The Septuagint (LXX, 250bc-150bc, Greek translation of the Old Testament) used this word for “comfort” (Gr. “paramuthia”) for the word “comfort” (Hb. “nacham”) which literally means in Hebrew “to breath strongly” and has come to mean “console, ease the situation, compassion toward.”<sup>7</sup>

#### **C. Rabbinical writing**

In Rabbinical literature this word was used of: (1.) Messianic expectation where the Messiah would bring “comfort” to Israel; and (2.) a work of love toward those who mourn.<sup>8</sup>

#### **D. Pre-New Testament writing**

The usage of this word prior to the New Testament times was one of “comfort and consoling.” There is a reference of Antoninus’ care of the Emperor Harrian; and of consolation for Alexander when he was depressed. Also, in a note from 48bc there was talk of giving comfort to others.<sup>9</sup>

### **E. During New Testament writing**

The usage of this word during the New Testament times (45ad-100ad) maintains the concept of “comfort, encouragement, and consolation.” To sum up the usage of this word is “giving comfort in a personal way which both builds up and establishes an individual thus giving them strength as an expression of love.”<sup>10</sup>

### **F. After New Testament**

The usage of this word after New Testament times was one of “comfort and consolation.” In 332ad, there was an address where a correspondent gives “consolation” to his friends. Also, a note of a philosopher sought out as a comforter and a note of turning to philosophy as a means of “consoling” themselves for their poverty or to alleviate their poverty.<sup>11</sup>

## **3. Word Usage in the New Testament**

### **A. John 11:19**

We have an example of many of the Jews who joined the women around Martha and Mary “to comfort” them, (John 11:19). Lazarus, their brother, had died. This word for comfort is a technical term for the expression of sympathy.<sup>12</sup>

### **B. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12**

Paul states one of the duties of a pastor is to “comfort” (Gr. “paramuthomenoi”) denoting “the soothing and encouraging side of exhortation, inspiring the converts to continue the desired course of action,” (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).<sup>13</sup> This word for comfort is “...soothing encouragement designed to cheer up and to inspire correct behavior.”<sup>14</sup>

### **C. 1 Thessalonians 5:14**

Paul commands (1 Thessalonians 5:14) that Christians continually “comfort” (Gr. “paramutheisthe” present active imperative) those who are “fainthearted” (Gr. “oligopsychoi” lit. “little souled”) which applies to “worry, fear, or discouragement.”<sup>15</sup> “These are people who needed encouragement. These fainthearted people tend to become discouraged and despondent more easily than most. They need cheering up, stimulation to press on, and extra help to live the Christian life.”<sup>16</sup>

### **D. 1 Corinthians 14:3**

Although the gift of prophecy has ceased with the passing of the apostles and prophets in the first century church, there are two facts that remain: (1.) the words they prophesied to the early church are recorded in God’s Word for us today, and (2.) the pastor took on some of the roles of the early apostles and prophets minus the role of prophecy. Thus “God’s Word” and “God’s man” (the pastor) are real keys to “comfort” (Gr. “paramuthia,” 1 Cor. 14:3) for the church. Paul is sharing with us in 1 Cor. 14:3, that this comfort helps “...allaying fear and enabling God’s people to be calm under pressure.”<sup>17</sup> Comfort “...calms the storms of fear, anxiety and despair. It helps us rest in the presence of Jesus.... It leads us away from the hectic bustle of daily affairs, away from the restlessness of this life, into the great peace of God.”<sup>18</sup>

### **E. Philippians 2:1**

Paul states that “joy” is based on four realities or four qualities which he lists in Philippians 2:1.<sup>19</sup> Each one of the four qualities is listed in an “if” clause, which in Greek is a first-class condition meaning each is assumed true, hence-forth a “reality.”<sup>20</sup> One of these realities is the “comfort” (Gr. “paramuthion”) of love, (Philippians 2:1). The Philippians were under affliction which brought discouragement. They lost some of their joy and were in danger of losing the rest of their joy. Paul tells them they have encouraged him in his affliction, and now “commands” them to express the “comfort of love” to each other so he would also be joyful.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. How are we to understand this word, “paramuthia?”**

“Paramuthia” has the following traits connected with it:

- used with someone who is under affliction experiencing fear, anxiety and despair
- used with someone faint-hearted or facing worry, fear or discouragement
- used with someone in danger of losing their Christian joy
- giving encouragement
- expressing sympathy
- expressing love
- imparting strength
- consoling
- inspiring to continue in a desired course of action
- inspiring correct behavior
- cheering up
- stimulating to press on in the Christian life
- giving extra help to live the Christian life
- enabling trust in God

Christians are commanded to use this “comfort” with other believers.

Perhaps a definition of “paramuthia” or “comfort” would be “giving comfort in a personal way which both builds up and establishes an individual thus giving them strength as an expression of love.”

#### **References:**

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- <sup>5</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Colin Brown, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979, vol. 1, p. 328
- <sup>6</sup>Commentary on Philippians, Peter O’Brien, New International Greek Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, p. 171
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