

## ENJOYING GOD'S COMFORT

2 Corinthians 1:3-14

The relationship Paul had with the church at Corinth was adverse or even tumultuous. Apparently, between the time of his first letter and the second letter, the church was in turmoil because of false teachers who came in and created a lot of acrimonious feeling in the church toward Paul. After the first letter, Paul sent Timothy to help the church and apparently he had no success. Timothy returned to Ephesus and reported to Paul about the worsening condition in the church at Corinth. This report caused Paul to change his travel plans that he had written about at the close of the first letter and he immediately went to Corinth. The strained relationship resulted in them treating him very harshly. He left and wrote a letter of reprimand (no copy available) which Titus delivered and then Titus stayed in Corinth to help the church get back on track. Apparently, Titus was successful in helping them and, later, he was able to visit with Paul and give a report that things had greatly improved. It was following this that Paul wrote Second Corinthians.

Paul could have just written them off as a bunch of rebels and jerks, but he did not treat them in the same way they treated him. Instead, he continued to care for them and when he had some assurance that they would listen resumed teaching them the principles of the Kingdom. This approach speaks well of Paul's integrity. He realized that he needed to act based on who he was in Christ and what God had called him to do.

### Comforted – 1:3-7

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. <sup>5</sup> For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. <sup>6</sup> But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; <sup>7</sup> and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort. 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (NASB95)

Paul started his letter with a word of praise to God. If we would always do this in the things in which we are involved, it would help us keep our priorities in proper order. We need to remind ourselves that our lives should not be about us and, contrary to what we often hear; it is not about other people. Instead, we must focus on God as revealed in Christ. The care for others (which is important) will follow naturally as we respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. When we approach life with these two considerations as our priority, then we will find that God is faithful in providing for all our personal needs.

Paul was quick to acknowledge God as the Source for everything good in life. He praised God, first of all, because He is the Father of the Lord Jesus, because He is the God of mercy (which finds its complete expression in the work of His Son), and because He is the Source of comfort for each of us (which we usually associate with the presence of the Holy Spirit).

All of us need comfort at some time in our lives. The closer we walk with God the more the world rejects us. We may find that this rejection takes the form of persecution which brings on suffering or tribulation. Sometimes it is physical suffering and at other times it can be emotional suffering. We are told elsewhere in Paul's writings (2 Tim 3:12) that "all who will live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer tribulation." When this happens, we can expect comfort from God. We have trouble(s) and God comforts us. But it doesn't have to (and should not) end there. We can learn from the experience of how important it is to receive encouragement and comfort when we are experiencing problems. Knowing that, then we should then be in perfect

position to pass on that kind of comfort to others who are hurting.

The problems we endure can also be viewed as a means to put self to death. They can be seen as more of the suffering of Christ with which we identify when we say that we are crucified with Christ. It is part of the ongoing “taking up our cross daily” and following the example of Christ. As we do this, then God’s grace will flow out from us to bring encouragement, consolation, and comfort to others in the same way that we are comforted by God.

Whether he and his fellow workers were suffering hardships or enjoying life the purpose of Paul’s life toward the Christians at Corinth did not change. He was working for their consolation and salvation. “Whether we be afflicted or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” The example Paul set, as he dealt with trouble, could be a source of inspiration for them when they would encounter problems in life.

Paul knew they would have problems. He wanted them to be ready to deal with difficult situations in the right manner and with the right attitude. Some people have problems and refuse to be helped. They will not accept encouragement and the result is that they become embittered. They conclude that life or God is not fair and they refuse any help or comfort. Paul hoped that as the Christians at Corinth encountered problems that they would accept the help God would send to them to help bring them through the trouble they were experiencing.

Paul said that the sufferings of Christ are ours. He did not mean that we are suffering exactly the same things that Jesus suffered but that we are suffering because we belong to Christ. Another way to look at this statement is that as Christians, we are the body of Christ. Because of this, we could logically argue that when we suffer, then Christ also suffers. Consequently, Christ knows what we are experiencing and, therefore, knows how to comfort us when we are experiencing tribulation.

In verse six, Paul told them that the afflictions he had experienced were for their encouragement and salvation and the encouragement he had received should be encouragement for them. This was his way of telling them that they would also have afflictions as a result of persecution and they could see, by Paul’s example, that such problems can be overcome and that the promises of God are sure. We see this promise in that Jesus told His disciples that He would send the Comforter Who would come along side of them to encourage and comfort.

### Tested – 1:8-11

<sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; <sup>9</sup> indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; <sup>10</sup> who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, <sup>11</sup> you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many. 2 Corinthians 1:8–11 (NASB95)

The problem with problems is that many times, we just don’t personally have the ability to deal with the troubles we encounter. Many times when we hear of someone overcoming great problems and that gives us encouragement to not give up when we encounter the inconveniences of life but to look to God for His help. We need to practice relying on God in even the small things and be in the habit of trusting Him so we can properly handle the larger problems that come along every so often. Paul could use his own life as a series of examples of having had problems that were so intense he literally did not have the strength to go on. He had been sentenced to death and could see no way to escape. In these trials he learned that even though our individual ability and strength have limits, God knows no limit. He learned to NOT trust in himself but to trust in God. His own past experience gave witness to the fact that at the time he

wrote this letter he was walking in such faith and he had confident hope that God's power would be there when he needed it in the future.

Paul gave God the glory for the deliverance he experienced; however, Paul acknowledged the importance of other people praying for him. We fail to realize how important our prayer ministry really is. If we had a better appreciation of how powerful prayer really is, then we would see more Christians engaged in it.

Those who do pray and see their prayers answered respond in thanksgiving to God. Often we will pray for something and when it happens we dismiss it as something that was going to happen anyway and we fail to express our appreciation to God for all the good things He has done. This failure to see the connection of prayer for God's help and the resulting deliverance from the problem could affect the way we approach the next situation that we encounter. If we are cognizant of the relationship between prayer and the solution to the problem, then we will be more likely to immediately ask for God's help rather than tackling the situation in our own strength and wit.

We've been focusing on how we react to problems and afflictions. We can condition ourselves to view such things as ways to grow to be more Christ like and to expect and count on the encouragement we will be given by the Holy Spirit and by our fellow Christians. We also see the need to encourage others in their times of troubles and afflictions. That is just one side of the coin.

What about situations in which we are doing well and having great success? How do we react and what actions do we take during such times as these? What about when others have success and are doing well? How do we react then? Do we see the "good" times as opportunities to grow to be more Christ like? Do we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit when things are great? Do we encourage others to seek the Lord when they are successful?

#### Accepted – 1:12-14

<sup>12</sup> For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. <sup>13</sup> For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end; <sup>14</sup> just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus. 2 Corinthians 1:12-14 (NASB95)

The background of the comments starting in verse twelve and continuing to the end of the chapter is related to Paul's intent to visit Corinth again as he had mentioned in the closing remarks of his first letter to them. Paul had intended to visit them twice after he had written his first letter to them. However, because of the strained relationship and harsh treatment he had encountered on his first visit, he decided it would not be good for him or them. This change of plans resulted in some of his critics in the church at Corinth accusing him of not keeping his word and having a lack of integrity in what he did and even in what he wrote to them. This passage was written in defense of the way Paul and his companions had interacted with the Corinthian church.

In verse twelve we see mention of three character traits that should be descriptive of the way any Christian should live and conduct themselves. Depending on the translations we are using the first two may be rendered as holiness, godly sincerity, simplicity, and frankness. The main two ideas are simply integrity and purity.

Integrity would suggest that our objectives, our overall purpose in life and the approach we take would not change because of the circumstance in which we find ourselves. In today vernacular we would render the Greek word used in the text as meaning "without pretense" or

“without hypocrisy.” We might even say, “what you see is what you get.” This is getting down to the meaning of integrity. We don’t act one way at church and behave a different way at work or on the golf course. We say what we mean and mean what we say. We must live in such a way that we please God in the hard times and the easy times, in the afflictions and in the victories.

The second attribute mentioned was purity. The word sincerity (used in various translations) has its roots in the idea of purity. The adjective “godly” would tell us of the extent of that purity; that is, it would be the highest level of purity you can imagine. The literal meaning of the Greek word is “found pure when unfolded and examined in the light of the sun.” This is getting down to the concept of what are the underlying motives that drive our behaviors. When we start peeling back the layers of our lives, will we find the right motives or will we find selfishness and pride? We would associate this character trait as being a strong companion of integrity.

The third attribute is the grace of God. This attribute is contrasted with the wisdom of the carnal mind. Most of us have memorized the definition of grace to be “unmerited favor.” It has a broader usage and carries the concept of “that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, and loveliness.”

Paul used these attributes to describe his behavior in dealing with all people and especially with those in Corinth. He essentially told them that he had been open (no hypocrisy), he had pure motives (sincere) and that he was guided by what would be pleasing to God and brings joy to Him.

Paul told them that his conscience gave testimony that his conduct was such that God would be pleased. This was a reason for rejoicing. Some of the attributes that he mentioned would provide a good checklist for us to use to see how we are doing in these areas. What is the testimony of our consciences regarding purity, integrity, and grace? With regard to conscience, Watchman Nee in the three-volume work on the Spiritual Man writes that the conscience is a function of the human spirit.

For those who have not been born again of the Spirit of God, the conscience is greatly influenced by the ethics and culture in which a person lives. What can happen in the interaction of the conscience is that we may initially experience a “message” from our conscience that a particular activity or attitude is wrong. Our rational minds then will react to such a “message” by comparing the activity with the prevailing culture and could decide that the culture is wrong or that our conscience is wrong. We can be “drawn away by our own lusts” in making that decision. Deciding against the preprogrammed conscience of innocence will weaken or contaminate the conscience so that the next time the message can be more easily ignored and we eventually just go with the culture without any additional consideration.

For the born-again child of God, the conscience has access to additional help that comes from the leading of the Holy Spirit to reinforce the right choice and bring conviction especially when we make the wrong choice. Since Paul was open and obedient to following the Holy Spirit, he could confidently write that his conscience was clear in the way he and his associates had dealt with those to whom God had called him to minister.

Just as Paul had noted that his conduct toward all (and especially toward those in the church at Corinth) was sincere, pure and demonstrated the grace of God, he went on to point out to them that his letters to them were written in the same way. Paul did not have a hidden message that could only be discerned by “reading between the lines,” but was plainly stated to say exactly what he meant to say.

Paul concluded this section by expressing the hope that the Corinthians would come to recognize that he and his colleagues were people of integrity whom they could affirm just as they would affirm them in the Judgment. Paul looked forward to rejoicing on the last day in what God had done in the lives of his converts, and he hoped that in the present they might feel they could rejoice because of what God was doing in him.