

God Comforts Us in All Our Afflictions

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

2 Corinthians 1:1-2: Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Background Notes

How many letters did the apostle Paul write to the church at Corinth? We don't know for sure, but possibly four. We have the two inspired letters that are included in the canon of Scripture, 1 and 2 Corinthians. However, there may have been two other letters that have been lost. Let me briefly describe one possible scenario of Paul's visits and correspondence with the Corinthian church.

The church at Corinth was founded on Paul's second missionary journey. Acts 18:1-4: *"After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks...*

11 "And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

18 "So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews."

Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, and completed his second missionary journey. Not too long after this time, Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and spent two and a half years there, preaching and teaching the Word of God. Early in this time of ministry at Ephesus, Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth, a letter that is now lost. He mentioned this letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9.

Because the Corinthian Christians misunderstood the first letter, and because he learned of further problems in the Corinthian church, Paul wrote a second letter to Corinth from Ephesus. That is the inspired letter of 2 Corinthians. It seems that soon after he wrote this letter (2 Corinthians), Paul also made a short visit to Corinth from Ephesus. That visit was described as the "painful visit" in 2 Corinthians 2:1.

Following the painful visit, Paul wrote to the Corinthians a third time, a letter that is described in 2 Corinthians 2:3 as the “sorrowful” or “severe letter.” Some Christians believe this “sorrowful” or “severe letter” is not a letter but is actually 1 Corinthians, but we can’t be sure. If it’s a third letter, it also is lost.

After Paul’s ministry at Ephesus, he moved on to Macedonia. There he met Titus, who was returning from Corinth, where he had delivered this letter (1 Corinthians) to the Corinthian church. Titus brought the good news that both the letter of 1 Corinthians and the “sorrowful letter” had resulted in the right action on the part of the Corinthians.

But now a new problem had arisen. Some believers at Corinth were questioning Paul’s authority as an apostle. In addition, they were allowing false teaching to creep into the church. So this is the occasion of the writing of this (possibly) fourth letter – the letter that we know as 2 Corinthians. It was written from Macedonia in about 57AD, when Paul met Titus returning from Corinth.

Notice that Paul emphasized his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ in the salutation of the letter (v1-2). His authority as an apostle was by the will of God, not by the will of men. Those who were questioning Paul’s authority had to understand this important fact.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers are afflicted so that they may experience and share God’s comfort.

Verses 3-7: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

Two words in this passage need a little further explanation. The word “*comfort*” used here is *not* the idea of “being comfortable,” like lying in a hammock in the shade on a hot summer day, sipping lemonade. The basic idea in this word “*comfort*” is *bringing comfort to another*, to give help or encouragement or assistance. The word means *to come alongside* to give help in time of need. The word “*comforter*” was used for one who helped (as in the case of a drowning swimmer), or interceded for (as in the case of a poor needy widow), or even defended in court (as in the case of an accused citizen). This is the word that is used for the Holy Spirit as our “*Comforter*” in John 14, 15 and 16. The *comforter’s* assistance could be given in the form of encouragement, or assistance, or even exhortation.

The other word that needs some explanation is the word “*affliction*” in verses 4 & 6. This word includes anything and everything that presses painfully in upon us from without - anything that burdens our spirits. It includes any trouble or distress, such as the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of persons. That’s what’s involved in this word “*affliction*”: “trouble” or “tribulation”.

Notice the two “alls” in these verses:

“All” #1 is in verse 3: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of **all** comfort.*” **God** is the source of **all comfort**. **All** comfort in time of need ultimately comes from God. In time of need, don’t look to the world for help, and don’t look inside yourself for help. Look to God! **He** is the source of all comfort. He may channel His comfort to us in any number of different ways, including circumstances and people - but ultimately God is the source of **all** comfort.

“All” #2 is in verse 4. “*God comforts us in **all** our tribulation that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*” Notice the first part of that verse -- God comforts us in **all** our tribulation or affliction!

Notice - it is **our** troubles, as they affect **us** - not what someone else thinks our trouble should be or should not be. Whatever is pressing in on our spirit, big or small, mountain or molehill, significant or insignificant, circumstances or people - if something is pressing in on your spirit and afflicting your soul, then God is concerned. And if you look to Him, He will come alongside you, and He will help you with encouragement (and/or exhortation, if you need that as well). One reason why God allows affliction and trouble to come into our lives is to allow us to know and experience His comfort. A little child who falls off her bike and scrapes her knee would not know and experience the comfort of her parents if she didn’t get hurt.

In addition, God “*comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*”(v4). God allows trouble to come into our lives so that we can experience His comfort. And when we have experienced His comfort, we will be prepared to share God’s comfort with others (v4-7). We in turn are to be channels of comfort to others. We are comforted - not to be comfortable, but to be comforters!

The sufferings of Christ that we share (v5) are not the sufferings of Christ on the cross for our sins. No, those sufferings are over - that work is finished. But the “sufferings of Christ that we share” are the sufferings on behalf of Christ. The Corinthian believers shared in those sufferings, and so will we, if we live committed lives as believers - in the office, on the job site, or in the classroom. As the Corinthian Christians were to pass on the comfort of God that they received in their

sufferings, so we are to share God's comfort with others who are suffering. Believers are afflicted so that they may experience and share God's comfort.

2. Believers are afflicted so they may experience and pray for God's deliverance.

Verses 8-11: For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, 11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many."

What was the trouble that came to the apostle Paul and his team in the Roman province of Asia (v8)? We don't know for sure. In any case, it was so severe that Paul despaired even of life. But God allowed this affliction so they would not trust in themselves, but in God who raises the dead (v9). And the Corinthians who were aware of the situation also prayed: "You also helping together in prayer for us"(v11). And God delivered them from the affliction - from the trouble, from the tribulation.

What a blessed experience! Being delivered from affliction as a result of much prayer is an unforgettable experience. Believers are afflicted so they may experience and pray for God's deliverance.

Practical Application

Let's pass it on!

Pass what on? God's comfort! Most of us remember the song "Pass It On." It refers to God's love – we're to pass on, like starting a fire from a spark.

Well, just as we're to pass on God's love, so we're also to pass on God's comfort. When we experience God's comfort in any kind of sorrow or affliction, we should look around to see if anyone else is facing that same kind of problem, or bearing that same kind of burden, or experiencing that same kind of trouble. We have a responsibility to "come alongside" that person. Because we've been through that same or similar situation, we can sympathize and empathize in a special way with that brother or sister – perhaps better than anyone else can at that moment. And we can bring the comfort of God that we've experienced to that person.

If God has comforted us in any kind of sorrow or trial, then let's come alongside and share His encouragement and comfort to others. Let's pass it on!