

TITLE: CHRISTIAN COMFORT (Needing it, Receiving it, Giving it)

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-11

INTRO: “A weak, sinful, rebellious, lascivious, licentious, selfish congregation” – after reading 1 Cor, this may be how many perceive the Corinthian brethren. Paul dealt with their following of men & not Christ, acceptance of fornication in the church, perversion of the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, & worship, etc. But what was their response to that letter?

I. THE SOURCE OF COMFORT (v. 3):

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” God is the giver of every good gift (**Jam 1:17**), so we know He is the source of all comfort. How can anyone comfort you without God (w/out the knowledge of His existence and His promise of eternal salvation)? What other comfort is there? Everything else is temporal at best (no *real* comfort), because Hell is still the end result!

II. THE PURPOSES OF COMFORT (v. 4-7):

A. Purpose stated: To benefit us and others (v. 4). “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort (purpose clause) them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

1. **God comforts us:** He comforts us in **all** our tribulation – what pain, suffering, persecution, sadness *can’t* He comfort? As a faithful Christian, what have you ever gone through that could take away your hope of Heaven?
2. **So we can comfort others:** “that we may be able...” – God’s comfort isn’t meant to stop at the 1st recipient!
 - a. The word “comfort” means “to call near (especially for help); encouragement, consolation.” It carries the idea of being made strong together (cf. **Eccl 4:12**–“If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken”).
 - b. God isn’t the source of evil (cf. **Jam 1:13-16**), but we do live in a world full of people who choose to be evil & do evil. And many times we’re the victims of their evil. But we can grow from this if we will.
 - c. Have you suffered in some way & been comforted? Pass it on! Don’t hoard the comfort! Sometimes we may not even think about this like we should. When you “survive” something, remember how (and *who* helped you). Then be ready to offer help when you see someone else dealing with the same thing. **Pass it on (give comfort)!**

B. Purpose displayed (v. 5-7). “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.”

1. **Paul’s encouragement (v. 5):** In Christ, we are new creatures (**5:17**), and there are many aspects of this new life, but with these things also comes persecution. Suffering is guaranteed (**2 Tim 3:12**), but in Christ, with suffering comes consolation/comfort. And the consolation *always* outweighs the suffering! “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour (help/relieve) them that are tempted” (**Heb 2:18**). **Heb 4:16**–“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, & find grace to help in time of need.” So we turn to God through prayer (and His Word).
 - But we also turn to Him through His people. We’re His family (the house of God - **1 Tim 3:15**). Other members have endured the same or similar trials you’re facing. They can help you (**v. 4**), but **you** need to accept it (**receive comfort**)!
2. **Their encouragement (v. 6-7):** “And whether (if) we be afflicted, it is for your consolation & salvation...”
 - a. If we’re afflicted (which they were-v. 8-9), it’s for you - *you* can benefit from our suffering! Why? Because you’re enduring the same sufferings (maybe not the same *level* of suffering, but you’re still suffering as Christians).
 - b. If we’re comforted (which they were **v. 10-11**), it’s for you. You can see that *we* were persecuted, but God took care of us (he’ll speak of this in more detail in **v. 8-11**), so you can know then that God will also take care of you!
 - c. We know this to be true (v. 7)! So often we picture the Corinthian brethren as weak (after reading 1 Cor). But 2 Cor shows that there clearly were some who were strong, and suffered from trying to live as Christians in this lascivious city. They needed God’s comfort to help them remain strong. And Paul *knows* they will receive it!

III. THE NEED FOR COMFORT (v. 8-11):

A. Comfort provided by God (v. 8-10): “...trouble which came to us in Asia...that we despaired even of life” (**v. 8**).

1. (**v. 8**) Here the need is expressed. They were “*pressed out of measure* (weighed down exceedingly), *above* (beyond) *strength* (ability), *so that we despaired* (utterly at loss; without hope) *even of life!*” We’re not told what this refers to (**Acts 19** in Ephesus, or **14:19** in Lystra), but it seems Paul was convinced he was going to die!
2. (**v. 9**) We had this sentence of death in us so we’d trust in God, not ourselves. Miraculously-speaking, God was going to take care of Paul, just as He’d promised (**Ac 18:9-10**). And Paul needed to trust this, even when he was this close to death! And this trust in God was to be an example to the Corinthians (and to us)!
3. (**v. 10**) Paul learned from this what God wanted him to learn: God delivered us, & we trust He’ll continue to deliver us!

B. Comfort provided by brethren (v. 11) “*Ye also helping together by prayer for us...*”

1. Paul acknowledges the comfort he received because of the Corinthians’ prayers. We can help & comfort each other by prayer, but not *only* prayer. Prayer is easy; the personal involvement in each other’s lives is harder! **Gal 6:2**–“*Bear ye one another’s burdens.*” But you can’t do *more* than praying until you pray! So start by praying for one another. In the Corinthians’ case, there probably wasn’t anything more they could’ve done for Paul. So they prayed!
2. And because of “*the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons*” (i.e., their answered prayers), many people could thank God. **Jam 5:16**–“*the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*” When you pray for someone, and God gives what you prayed for, let that person know (and the church) so we can rejoice and thank God!

CONCLUSION: Have you ever been persecuted to the point you thought you were going to die? Ever been completely powerless? God expected Paul to learn from these situations to **trust in Him**. **Psa 116:8**–“*For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.*” What can we learn from *our* situations (which pale in comparison)? Trust in God; He is the ultimate source of comfort (on Earth – through prayer, His Word, and the brethren), and eternally (trust His promise of Heaven).