

SERIES: II CORINTHIANS: THE HEART AND HUMILITY OF A
MAN OF GOD, WEEK 2

TITLE: THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

TEXT: II CORINTHIANS 1:3-7

INTRODUCTION: (1) IN 1981, A JEWISH RABBI NAMED
HAROLD KUSHNER WROTE A BOOK TITLED: "WHEN BAD
THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE."

* IT WAS A NUMBER ONE BEST SELLER, SELLING OVER A
MILLION COPIES.

** THE GIST AND MOTIVATION BEHIND THE BOOK CAME
FROM KUSHNER'S LIFE EVENTS.

*** FOR AS A YOUNG THEOLOGY STUDENT HE WAS
PUZZLED OVER THE BOOK OF JOB. BEYOND THAT, AS A
SMALL TOWN RABBI HE COUNSELED OTHER PEOPLE
THROUGH PAIN AND GRIEF, TRYING TO COMFORT THEM.

**** BUT NOT UNTIL HE LEARNED THAT HIS 3 YEAR OLD
SON AARON WOULD DIE IN HIS EARLY TEENS OF A RARE
DISEASE, DID HE CONFRONT ONE OF LIFE'S MOST

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS: WHERE DO WE FIND THE RESOURCES TO COPE WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES?

(2) KUSHNER WRITES: "I KNEW ONE DAY I WOULD WRITE THIS BOOK. I WOULD WRITE IT OUT OF MY OWN NEED TO PUT INTO WORDS SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE AND KNOW. AND I WOULD WRITE IT TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE WHO MIGHT ONE DAY FIND THEMSELVES IN A SIMILAR PREDICAMENT. I AM FUNDAMENTALLY A RELIGIOUS MAN WHO HAS BEEN HURT BY LIFE, AND I WANTED TO WRITE A BOOK THAT COULD BE GIVEN TO THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN HURT BY LIFE, AND WHO KNOWS IN HIS HEART THAT IF THERE IS JUSTICE IN THE WORLD, HE DESERVED BETTER..."

** IF YOU ARE SUCH A PERSON, IF YOU WANT TO BELIEVE IN GOD'S GOODNESS AND FAIRNESS BUT FIND IT HARD BECAUSE OF THE THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU AND PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT, AND IF THIS BOOK HELPS YOU DO THAT, THEN I WILL HAVE SUCCEEDED IN DISTILLING SOME BLESSING OUT OF AARON'S PAIN AND TEARS." (END QUOTE)

*** NOW OUR HEARTS GO OUT TO ANYONE WHO HAS GONE THROUGH HEART BREAKING CIRCUMSTANCES LIKE HAROLD KUSHNER.

** AND CERTAINLY A DESIRE TO HELP PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH GREAT TRAGEDY IS A NOBLE PURPOSE.

*** HOWEVER, TWO THINGS COME TO THE FOREFRONT. RELIGION IN AND OF ITSELF WILL NOT BRING TRUE COMFORT.

(3) AND NO. 2 THERE IS A FAULTY PREMISE IN THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK.

* FOR THE BIBLE TOTALLY REJECTS THE UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION THAT PEOPLE ARE TRULY GOOD.

** ROMANS 3:10-12 AND ROMANS 3:23 COMMUNICATE THAT NONE OF US ARE GOOD IN AND OF OURSELVES. IN FACT, THE SCRIPTURES COMMUNICATE HUMAN DEPRAVITY.

*** ALL OF US HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD (QUOTE ROMANS 3:10-12&23).

**** NOW BEYOND ROMANS 3, PSALM 14:1-3 AND PSALM 53:1-3 BASICALLY COMMUNICATE THE SAME THINGS, QUOTE PSALM 14:1-3.

(4) AND THEN PSALM 143:2 SAYS: **“AND DO NOT ENTER INTO JUDGMENT WITH YOUR SERVANT, FOR IN YOUR SIGHT NO MAN LIVING IS RIGHTEOUS.”**

*** QUOTE ECCLESIASTES 7:20 AND JEREMIAH 17:9.**

**** NOW WITH THOSE TRUTHS BEFORE US, THE GENERAL POINT MUST BE MADE THAT BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO ALL PEOPLE BECAUSE WE ARE SINNERS WHO LIVE IN A FALLEN, SIN CURSED WORLD.**

***** AND BEYOND THAT, BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOD'S PEOPLE, BECAUSE REDEEMED SINNERS LIVE IN A FALLEN WORLD AND GOD HAS ORDAINED THAT BAD TIMES GROW AND SANCTIFY US.**

****** IN FACT, ONE OF THE MANY PARADOXES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS THAT THE GRACE OF GOD IS MOST KEENLY EXPERIENCED NOT IN THE BEST OF TIMES, BUT IN WHAT APPEARS TO US TO BE THE WORST OF TIMES.**

(5) BUT ONE THING WE CAN RELY UPON DURING THOSE TIMES IS THAT GOD DOES NOT PUT TRUE BELIEVERS THROUGH SUFFERING WITHOUT CAUSE OR GOOD PURPOSE.

*** AND NOT ONLY DOES GOD USE SUFFERING TO SANCTIFY PEOPLE, BUT ALSO TO SAVE PEOPLE. AND ONE THING WE CAN KNOW FOR SURE, IS DURING TIMES OF SUFFERING WHICH WE CAN'T FIGURE OUT, OUR GOD IS THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT! THAT IS A PART OF WHO HE IS.**

**** AND BY ANY ESTIMATION II CORINTHIANS 1:3-7, OUR TEXT TODAY, FRAMES THE BIBLE'S GREATEST TEXT ON COMFORT.**

***** NOW WHY WOULD I MAKE THAT DOGMATIC OF A STATEMENT?**

****** WELL, THE WORD "COMFORT" OCCURS 10 TIMES IN ITS NOUN AND VERB FORMS IN THE BRIEF PARAGRAPH OF II CORINTHIANS 1:3-7.**

(6) AND 10 OCCURRENCES ARE ALMOST ONE THIRD OF ALL 31 OCCURRENCES OF THIS WORD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

*** AND PAUL SAYS MORE ABOUT SUFFERING AND MORE ABOUT COMFORT THAN ANY OTHER WRITER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND IT IS HERE IN II CORINTHIANS 1:3-7 THAT HE SAYS THE MOST ABOUT IT.**

**** SO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOD'S PEOPLE. A LOT OF BAD THINGS HAPPENED TO PAUL FROM A TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE AND PAUL EXPERIENCED GOD'S COMFORT IN PROFOUND WAYS.**

***** AND IN THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK OF II CORINTHIANS, RIGHT OUT OF THE BLOCKS AFTER HIS GREETING AND SALUTATION PAUL TALKS ABOUT COMFORT 10 TIMES IN 5 VERSES.**

****** AND THERE IS A REASON FOR THIS, AND IT WAS TO ANSWER CRITICS AT CORINTH WHO HELD THAT THE SUFFERINGS THAT CHARACTERIZED PAUL'S LIFE WERE EVIDENCES THAT HE WAS NOT AN APOSTLE, BECAUSE IF HE WAS THE REAL THING, A REAL APOSTLE, HE WOULD NOT BE EXPERIENCING SO MUCH TROUBLE, DIFFICULTY AND PAIN.**

(7) BUT PAUL'S ANSWER WAS THAT ABUNDANT SUFFERING AND ABUNDANT COMFORT BY THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT ARE IN FACT SIGNS OF APOSTOLIC AUTHENTICITY, OF BEING A TRUE APOSTLE.

*** AND PAUL'S LORD, PAUL'S GOD, WAS THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT, THE TITLE OF OUR MESSAGE TODAY, "THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT."**

**** AND UNDER THAT TITLE WE'LL LOOK AT 3 MAIN POINTS AS WE WORK THROUGH THIS PASSAGE ABOUT COMFORT IN II CORINTHIANS 1:3-7.**

***** NO. 1 WE'LL SEE THE PRAISE FROM PAUL TO THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT, VV. 3&4A; NO. 2 THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S COMFORT IN PAUL'S LIFE, V. 4B; AND NO. 3 THE PRINCIPLE OF GOD'S COMFORT FOR PAUL AND THE CHURCH AT CORINTH, VV. 5-7.**

****** AND WITH THAT OUTLINE AS A GUIDE FOR US TODAY, LOOK AT II CORINTHIANS 1:3 PLEASE WHERE WE'LL START TO SEE OUR FIRST POINT TODAY, THE PRAISE FROM PAUL.**

I. THE PRAISE, (READ V. 3)

A. NOW AFTER PAUL'S SALUTATION IN VV. 1&2, HE BREAKS FORTH IN PRAISE IN V. 3 PRAISING GOD, BLESSING GOD.

* AND THE GREEK WORD BLESSED HERE IS U-LOAG-A-TOCE FROM WHICH OUR ENGLISH WORD EULOGY COMES FROM, WHICH MEANS TO SPEAK WELL OF, THE GREEK WORD LIT. MEANS TO PRAISE.

** AND PAUL BREAKS FORTH IN PRAISING GOD, IN THANKING GOD. AND THE PRAISE IS ADDRESSED TO THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

*** AND BY DESCRIBING GOD AS THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST PAUL REVEALS THE N.T. CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD. GOD IS THE ONE REVEALED IN THE SON WHOM HE SENT INTO THE WORLD, QUOTE JOHN 1:14, JOHN 1:18 AND GALATIANS 4:4.

**** AND BELOVED FROM OLD AND N.T. REVELATION WE KNOW THAT THERE IS BUT ONE TRUE GOD, AND HE IS

THE GOD WHO SENT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO BE THE SAVIOR.

1. AND THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE TRINITY BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON IS UNIQUE. GOD THE FATHER, THE FIRST PERSON OF THE TRINITY SENT GOD THE SON, IN THE TRINITARIAN WORKINGS AND PLAN TO BE THE SAVIOR OF HIS PEOPLE.

* AND GOD WAS THE FATHER OF JESUS IN THE SENSE THAT JESUS HAD COME FROM GOD THE FATHER, WAS SENT BY GOD THE FATHER, NOT THAT JESUS HAD BEEN CREATED BY GOD THE FATHER, FOR JESUS WAS GOD SUBMITTING TO HIS FATHER IN HIS INCARNATION TO BE SAVIOR GOD.

** AND SOME MAY WONDER WHY SINCE THEY ARE FULLY EQUAL, THE FATHER IS REFERRED TO AS THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST?

*** WELL, IN THE TRINITARIAN PLAN AND WORKINGS, JESUS IS FULLY EQUAL IN HIS DEITY TO THE FATHER, BUT IN HIS INCARNATION IN BECOMING A MAN, IN HIS HUMANITY JESUS SUBMITTED TO HIS FATHER.

**** AND PAUL'S N.T. STATEMENT OF GOD HERE THAT HE PRAISES IS GOD WHO IS SAVIOR GOD. FOR THE TITLE

HERE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IN V. 3, COMMUNICATES CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE WORK AND PURPOSE.

2. FOR THE WORD LORD DESCRIBES HIS SOVEREIGN DEITY: THE WORD JESUS MEANS SAVIOR, GOD SAVES, DESCRIBING HIS SAVING DEATH AND RESURRECTION AND THE WORD CHRIST MEANS ANOINTED ONE, THE MESSIAH, THE KING WHO WILL ULTIMATELY RULE ON EARTH, DEFEATING ALL HIS ENEMIES.

* SO RATHER THAN REFERRING TO GOD AS THE O.T. FREQUENTLY DID, AS THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB, THE N.T. IDENTIFIES IN ONE OF THE EARLIER EPISTLES CHRONOLOGICALLY, GOD AS THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

** SO RIGHT OUT OF THE CHUTE PAUL BEGINS WITH PRAISE, WITH THANKSGIVING FOR THE GOD WHO SAVES, FOR THE GOD WHO IS A GOD OF GRACE AS HE BECOMES OUR FATHER THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IN SAVING US.

*** BUT MOVING ON, PAUL ALSO PRAISES AND THANKS GOD AS THE FATHER OF MERCIES AND GOD OF ALL COMFORT.

**** AND THE WORD MERCIES LIT. MEANS COMPASSION AND IS TRANSLATED THAT WAY IN THE NIV.

3. AND MERCY-COMPASSION ILLUSTRATED IS SOVEREIGN PITY SHOWN TO A DEFEATED FOE; IT IS THE COMPASSION SHOWN BY A GREAT KING TO A BEATEN ENEMY WHO DID EVERYTHING TO OVERTHROW HIS RIGHTFUL LORD.

* AND BY ITS NATURE, MERCY IS FOR THE UNDESERVING. IT IS PARDON FOR REBELS. AND PAUL'S PHRASE HERE, FATHER OF MERCIES, REMINDS US THAT MERCY BEGINS AND ENDS WITH GOD, HE IS THE SOURCE AND ORIGINATOR OF MERCY.

** SIMON KISTEMAKER IN HIS COMMENTARY ON II CORINTHIANS SAID AND I QUOTE: "MERCY OR COMPASSION IS GOD'S LOVE THAT SEEKS OUT, EXTENDS TO AND TRANSFORMS THE SINNER." (END QUOTE)

*** AND FOR PAUL, GOD'S MERCY WAS ALWAYS A MOTIVATION FOR PRAISE, WORSHIP AND SERVICE, EVEN TO BE A LIVING SACRIFICE, QUOTE ROMANS 12:1.

**** AND IF YOU ARE A BELIEVER TODAY, OUR GOD IS THE FATHER OF MERCIES, AND IT IS NO SMALL THING TO RECEIVE MERCY OR COMPASSION FROM THE KING OF

THE UNIVERSE AND IT SHOULD MOTIVATE US TO SELFLESS SERVICE IF WE HAVE EXPERIENCED IT.

4. BUT NOT ONLY IS GOD THE FATHER OF MERCIES, HE IS THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT.

* AND HERE IN THIS TEXT, THE IDEA OF COMFORT IS “TO STRENGTHEN MUCH,” “TO ENCOURAGE,” “TO STAND BY ANOTHER AND ENCOURAGE THEM AS THEY ENDURE TESTING AND TRIALS.

** AND PAUL WANTED HIS HEARERS TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE MERCIFUL FATHER IS THE AUTHOR OF ALL POSSIBLE COMFORT AND CONSOLATION. AND THERE IS NO ENDURING COMFORT APART FROM HIM. HE IS THE ULTIMATE AND LASTING SOURCE, THE WELLSPRING OF COMFORT, CONSOLATION AND SOLACE.

*** GOD IS THE ONE THAT COMES ALONGSIDE OF US AND GIVES US SOLACE, PEACE AND STRENGTH IN THE MIDST OF GRIEF, SORROW, PAIN AND STRESSES IN TRIALS. GOD IS OUR ENCOURAGER WHICH IS A BASELINE MEANING OF THE WORD COMFORT. AND THE WORDS HELP AND ADVOCACY ALSO CONVEY PART OF THE RICH MEANING OF THIS WORD.

**** AND BELOVED, GOD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE BY ENCOURAGING, HELPING AND STRENGTHENING THEM,

SO THAT THEY ARE NOT CRUSHED BY AFFLICTION, PAIN AND TRIALS.

5. HE IS ACCORDING TO PSALM 46:1: (QUOTE IT).

* AND PAUL PRAISES GOD, HE BLESSES GOD, HE WORSHIPS GOD FOR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND WHO HE IS, THAT HE IS THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT.

** AND FOR THIS REASON PAUL MOVES FROM A STATEMENT OF WHO GOD IS IN V. 3, TO DECLARE WHAT GOD DOES IN V. 4A. SO LOOK AT V. 4A WITH ME PLEASE.

B. READ V.4A. NOW THE WORD TRANSLATED AFFLICTION, TRIBULATION OR TROUBLES IN V. 4 DEPENDING ON WHICH TRANSLATION YOU HAVE LIT. MEANS "PRESSURE."

* AND IT CAN REFER TO DISTRESS OR PAIN BROUGHT ABOUT EITHER BY OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES OR INWARD PRESSURES.

** AND THROUGH ALL THE STRESS, TRIALS AND PERSECUTION PAUL WENT THROUGH, HE EXPERIENCED GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT, GOD'S COMFORTING STRENGTHENING PRESENCE.

** NOW WHAT A HELP THAT WAS FOR PAUL IN ALL THAT HE WENT THROUGH FOR THE SAKE OF HIS LORD IN TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, PAIN AND PRESSURES.

*** BUT GET THIS, PAUL SAW THE BIGGER PICTURE IN GOD COMFORTING FOR A LARGER, BROADER PURPOSE BEYOND HIMSELF.

**** PAUL'S FOCUS WAS UPWARD IN V. 3&4A, BUT OUTWARD IN V. 4B.

1. PAUL MOVES FROM A STATEMENT OF WHO GOD IS IN V. 3, TO A DECLARATION OF WHAT GOD DOES IN V. 4A, TO GOD'S GOAL FOR DOING IT IN V. 4B, GOD'S PURPOSE IN COMFORTING PAUL.

* SO LOOK BACK AT V. 4 PLEASE WHERE WE'LL SEE OUR 2'D POINT TODAY, THE PURPOSE.

ii. THE PURPOSE, (READ V. 4)

A. NOW WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S COMFORT IN PAUL'S LIFE? AND LET ME SAY PAUL IS SPEAKING OF HIMSELF IN V. 4A BY USING THE PLURAL PRONOUNS "US" AND "OUR" AND "WE."

* IT IS WHAT IS CALLED A LITERARY PLURAL OFTEN CALLED THE APOSTOLIC WE.

** AND PAUL DOES THIS TO REFLECT HIS AWARENESS THAT HE IS NOT SPEAKING MERELY AS AN INDIVIDUAL, BUT AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE APOSTOLIC OFFICE. SO PAUL IS SPEAKING ABOUT HIMSELF.

*** FOR BE REMINDED, PAUL IS DEFENDING HIS APOSTOLIC MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF THOSE WHO CALLED HIS LEGITIMACY INTO QUESTION, PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF HIS WEAKNESS AND SUFFERING.

**** BUT PAUL'S ARGUMENT IS MY SUFFERING AND PRESSURES GIVE EVIDENCE OF MY APOSTOLIC MINISTRY. GOD IS AT WORK IN MY LIFE. AND LIKE JOB'S FRIENDS WHO MISUNDERSTOOD GOD'S HIGHER PURPOSE, THERE WERE THOSE IN CORINTH THAT WERE QUESTIONING PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP, NOT UNDERSTANDING GOD'S HIGHER WAYS!

1. SO PAUL DOES SOME SPIRITUAL ALGEBRA HERE AND HERE IT IS: THE MEASURE OF GOD'S COMFORT MATCHES THE MEASURE OF PAUL'S SUFFERING, WITH THE RESULT THAT OTHERS MAY BE COMFORTED TO THE SAME DEGREE.

* AND HERE IS THE SPIRITUAL EQUATION: PAUL'S SUFFERING + GOD'S COMFORT = COMFORT FOR OTHERS.

** THEREFORE PAUL SAW ANOTHER ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD'S COMFORT IN HIS LIFE, HE WAS NOT

COMFORTED TO BE COMFORTABLE, BUT TO BE A COMFORTER TO OTHERS.

*** AND JUST AS SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE NOT INTENDED SOLELY FOR THE RECIPIENTS BENEFIT, BUT ARE TO BE USED IN TURN FOR MINISTRY TO OTHERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH BODY, SO COMFORT RECEIVED FROM GOD ENABLES BELIEVERS TO COMFORT OTHERS. THERE IS ANOTHER PURPOSE.

**** IN OTHER WORDS, THE COMFORT OF GOD IS CHANNELED THROUGH OTHER BELIEVERS WHO COMFORT AND ENCOURAGE US, HAVING GONE THROUGH SIMILAR TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS.

2. AND BELOVED THE TESTIMONY OF GOD'S STRENGTHENING GRACE AND COMFORT IN ONE'S LIFE DURING TRIBULATION AND TRIALS IS A FORCEFUL REMINDER TO OTHERS OF GOD'S ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE THE GRACE, STRENGTH AND ENCOURAGEMENT THEY NEED.

* AND SOMETIMES WE MAY HELP OTHERS AS WE OURSELVES HAVE TRODDEN THAT PATH THEY HAVE TO TREAD.

** FOR EXAMPLE, OFTEN WE MAY EFFECTIVELY SYMPATHIZE WITH THE GRIEVING ONLY WHEN WE HAVE KNOWN GRIEF OURSELVES.

*** THE COMFORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT WE SEEK TO GIVE OTHERS THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM GOD IN OUR PERSONAL TIMES OF TROUBLE HAS A UNIQUELY GENUINE RING.

**** AND GOD ORDAINS FROM THE BEGINNING THE PEOPLE HE IS GOING TO SEND ACROSS OUR PATH THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES. THEREFORE NOTHING IS EVER WASTED IN GOD'S SCHOOL OF SUFFERING.

3. WE RECEIVE GOD'S COMFORT AND WE IN TURN CAN USE THE SCRIPTURES AND EXPERIENCE TO COMFORT OTHERS.

* AND PAUL SAW THAT GREAT PURPOSE AND ETERNAL PURPOSE IN HIS OWN SUFFERINGS. AND WITH PRAISE AND PURPOSE BEFORE US, WE COME TO SOME PRINCIPLES OF COMFORT IN VV. 5-7. LOOK AT VERSE 5 TO BEGIN WITH PLEASE.

III. THE PRINCIPLES, (READ V. 5)

A. NOW VERSE 5 SUPPLIES THE PRINCIPLE OF WHY SUFFERING EQUIPPED PAUL TO PASS ON GOD'S COMFORT. AND THE REASON THAT PAUL CAN COMFORT OTHERS IS THAT THE COMFORTS OF CHRIST ARE EQUAL TO THE SUFFERINGS THAT ARE ENDURED FOR HIM.

* LET ME EXPLAIN. THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST THAT ARE REFERRED TO HERE DO NOT REFER TO CHRIST'S AGONY ON THE CROSS AS THE SUBSTITUTE FOR THE BELIEVER'S SIN, THE ATONING SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST. THOSE WERE UNIQUE AND NO HUMAN BEING CAN SHARE THEM.

** BUT RATHER THEY REFER TO THE SUFFERINGS THAT COME TO THOSE INVOLVED IN THE SERVICE OF CHRIST. SUFFERINGS THAT OCCUR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST, SUFFERINGS THAT CHRISTIANS GO THROUGH FOR THEIR SAVIOR.

*** AND HERE IN V. 5 THEY ARE CALLED CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS BECAUSE THEY COME FROM FOLLOWING HIM AND PERSECUTION AGAINST CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS IS THE SAME AS PERSECUTION AGAINST CHRIST HIMSELF.

**** FOR WHEN CHRIST SPEAKS TO PAUL ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS IN ACTS 9:4 HE SAID, "SAUL, SAUL, WHY ARE YOU PERSECUTING ME?"

1. WELL PAUL HAD NOT PERSONALLY PERSECUTED CHRIST, BUT PAUL PERSECUTED HIS FOLLOWERS, AND TO PERSECUTE A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST WAS TO PERSECUTE CHRIST HIMSELF.

* SO THESE SUFFERINGS PAUL SUFFERED FOR CHRIST ARE CALLED CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS. AND PAUL HAD SUFFERED FOR CHRIST ABUNDANTLY, THEY WERE OVERFLOWING AND GOING BEYOND THE NORM.

** BUT AS PAUL'S SUFFERINGS FOR CHRIST WERE ABUNDANT, SO PAUL'S COMFORT WAS ABUNDANT THROUGH CHRIST, OVERFLOWING THROUGH CHRIST.

*** AND THE PRINCIPLE OF V. 5 IS, THE COMFORTING OVERFLOWS. PAUL EXPERIENCED OVERFLOWING COMFORT, A FLOOD OF CONSOLATION AND COMFORT FROM CHRIST.

**** SO WHENEVER CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS WERE MULTIPLIED IN PAUL'S LIFE, AND WHEN HE FELT HE REACHED THE END OF WHAT HE COULD HANDLE, CHRIST'S COMFORT WOULD OVERFLOW LIKE A FLOODED RIVER OVERFLOWING ITS BANKS AND FILLING PAUL TO THE BRIM WITH CHRIST'S COMFORT. WHAT AN ENCOURAGING PICTURE AND PRINCIPLE.

2. FOR WHEN WE FEEL OVERWHELMED WITH TRIALS, GOD FLOODS OUR LIVES WITH MORE STRENGTHENING GRACE AND COMFORT. HIS STRENGTHENING GRACE THEN BECOMES SUFFICIENT FOR US.

* AND AFTER PAUL ESTABLISHES THAT PRINCIPLE, HE FOCUSES AND RETURNS TO THE PRINCIPLE OF THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERINGS IN HIS OWN LIFE, AND GOD'S PURPOSE. LOOK AT V. 6 PLEASE.

B. READ V. 6. NOW THE OVERFLOWING NATURE OF GOD'S COMFORT ANTICIPATES ITS ABUNDANT APPLICATION.

* FOR PAUL VIEWS BOTH HIS EXPERIENCE OF AFFLICTIONS AND HIS EXPERIENCE OF COMFORT AS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CORINTHIAN'S COMFORT.

** PAUL RESTATES V. 4B AND APPLIES IT. THE PURPOSE OF MY COMFORT IS SO I CAN COMFORT YOU, SO I CAN SERVE YOU, "IT IS FOR YOUR COMFORT AND SALVATION."

*** TO SAY IT ANOTHER WAY. GOD USED PAUL'S SUFFERING TO SANCTIFY BELIEVERS AT CORINTH AND TO SAVE UNBELIEVERS AT CORINTH.

**** PAUL NEVER VIEWED HIS SUFFERINGS IN ISOLATION, NOR DID HE VIEW THEM WITHOUT PURPOSE. PAUL SAW THAT HE WAS IN PARTNERSHIP TO OTHERS IN ALWAYS HELPING THEM ON TO SANCTIFICATION AND TO OTHERS FOR THEIR SALVATION.

1. AND PAUL WAS ABLE TO IN THE LAST PART OF V. 6, TO EXTEND TO THE CORINTHIAN'S COMFORT, WHICH WAS

EFFECTIVE IN STRENGTHENING THEM FOR THEIR PATIENT ENDURING OF THE SAME SUFFERING WHICH HE ALSO SUFFERED.

* AND IN THE MUTUALITY OF MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH BODY, IN APPLYING THE ONE ANOTHERS, THE CORINTHIANS COULD ACTUALLY COMFORT PAUL THROUGH THEIR SALVATION AND SANCTIFICATION.

** AND GOING BACK TO PAUL, PAUL'S EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S COMFORT IS TO PRODUCE ENDURANCE, A SUSTAINING PERSEVERANCE WHENEVER THE CORINTHIAN'S UNDERGO SUFFERINGS LIKE PAUL.

*** LIKE PAUL, THEY TOO CAN RELY ON GOD TO COMFORT THEM. AND WHEN THEY SUFFER FOR CHRIST GOD COMFORTS THEM AND HELPS THEM PERSEVERE THROUGH SUFFERING AND EQUIPS THEM TO COMFORT OTHERS. BELOVED, OUR LIVES ARE INTERCONNECTED AND THERE IS INTERDEPENDENCE.

2. AND THAT PRINCIPLE LEADS TO OUR LAST VERSE FOR TODAY. LOOK AT V. 7 PLEASE.

C. READ V. 7. NOW THIS ABILITY TO ENDURE IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY IS PAUL'S HOPE FOR THE CORINTHIANS.

* AND THE WORD HOPE HERE DOES NOT REFER TO WISHFUL THINKING, BUT TO A CERTAINTY AND CONFIDENCE OF THE FUTURE.

** SO IT WAS PAUL'S CONFIDENT EXPECTATION. FOR RIGHTEOUS SUFFERING FOR CHRIST IS A MARK, A FRUIT OF BEING A TRUE BELIEVER.

*** THEREFORE PAUL WAS ABLE TO SAY CONFIDENTLY, HIS HOPE WAS FIRMLY GROUNDED, FOR THOSE SUFFERING FOR CHRIST AT CORINTH, SEEING THE FRUIT OF THEIR SHARING PAUL'S SUFFERINGS BY ACTS OF SUPPORT, SO YOU ALSO ARE SHARERS OF OUR COMFORT, OF PAUL'S COMFORT.

**** IN OTHER WORDS, THE CORINTHIANS DEMONSTRATED THE REALITY OF THEIR FAITH BY THEIR WILLINGNESS TO SHARE PAUL'S SUFFERINGS FOR THE GOSPEL.

1. AND BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITHFUL ENDURANCE, THEY ALSO WERE SHARERS OF THE SAME COMFORT WITH WHICH GOD COMFORTED PAUL.

IN WRAP UP: (1) FOR THOSE OF YOU TODAY WHO ARE AFFLICTED AND SUFFERING, REMEMBER THIS PASSAGE PROMISES OVERFLOWING COMFORT.

* FOR THE TRUTH IS THAT GOD'S COMFORT ALWAYS EXCEEDS OUR AFFLICTIONS, THERE IS ALWAYS STRENGTHENING GRACE AVAILABLE.

** BUT SADLY, SOME PASTORS TODAY UNHELPFULLY RAISE THE HOPES OF THE SHEEP BY PROMISING THEM IMMEDIATE HEALTH AND PROSPERITY AS THEIR DUE PORTION FROM GOD.

*** AND THESE PROMISES APPEAR TO BE TAILOR-MADE FOR A CULTURE WHOSE NEED FOR INSTANT GRATIFICATION IS UNPRECEDENTED.

**** BUT THE FAITHFUL APOSTLE PAUL IN CONTRAST, SOBERLY REFERS TO HIS READERS SUFFERINGS, AND HE PROMISES NOT IMMEDIATE HEALING AND SUCCESS, BUT GOD'S COMFORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT, WHICH THEY WILL EXPERIENCE AS THEY PATIENTLY ENDURE.

(2) AND MAY WE SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE OF SANCTIFICATION AND SALVATION IN SUFFERING, AND THAT GOD WILL USE OUR SUFFERING TO COMFORT OTHERS. MAY WE BE MINISTERS OF MERCY AND COMPASSION TO THOSE THAT ARE HURTING.

* FOR THE END OF ALL EXPERIENCES AND SUFFERING AND OUR THEOLOGY SHOULD BE DOXOLOGY. PRAISING

THE FATHER OF MERCIES AND THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT, SAVIOR GOD.

** AND THE IMPORTANT THING THROUGH SUFFERING IS TO FOCUS UPWARD AND OUTWARD.

*** AS WARREN WIERSBE SAID: REMEMBER WHAT GOD IS TO YOU – THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF MERCIES AND THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT.

**** REMEMBER WHAT GOD DOES FOR YOU – THAT HE IS ABLE TO HANDLE YOUR TRIALS AND MAKE THEM WORK OUT FOR YOUR GOOD AND GOD'S GLORY.

(3) AND FINALLY REMEMBER WHAT GOD DOES THROUGH YOU – AND LET HIM USE YOU TO BE AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS. (LET'S PRAY)

