

# BUILDING A HEALTHY BODY – TEN WAYS I THESSALONIANS 4:18

One thing for sure, the early church knew how to be comforting and encouraging one another. They faced such a hostile world united against them, they had no where to turn but to God and no one to lean on but each other! A notable example of this is the death of Polycarp a man led to Christ by the Apostle John and living into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century church as a leader and pastor.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp is one of the better-known stories from the pages of early Christian history. We have no idea who the original author was, but we know Polycarp himself rather well. He was apparently a disciple of the apostle John who served as bishop (or pastor) of the Church at Smyrna, not far from Ephesus. We have a letter he wrote to the Philippian church, but over the years Christians have remembered him most often as the steadfast martyr who dared to defy the Roman authorities in the year 155 or 156.

When riots against Christians first broke out in Smyrna, Polycarp's friends urged him to withdraw to a farm outside the city. He did. But when members of his own household disclosed his hideout, police came to arrest him and delivered him to the proconsul at the city arena, which was crowded with spectators awaiting the execution of the notorious leader of the Christians.

When he entered the arena...[the] proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar or death. Eighty and six years have I served Him said Polycarp, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me? The proconsul threatened him with burning, and Polycarp replied: You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire that awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.

But the proconsul was insistent and said: "Take the oath, and I shall release you. Curse Christ." Polycarp said: "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The proconsul said, "Try to persuade the people."

And when he had said these things and many besides he was inspired with courage and joy, and his face was full of grace, so that not only did it not fall with dismay at the things said to him, but on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his own

herald into the midst of the arena to proclaim three times: "Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian."

When this was said by the herald, the entire crowd of heathen and Jews who lived in Smyrna shouted with uncontrollable anger and a great cry: "This one is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many not to sacrifice nor to worship."

Then these things happened with such dispatch, quicker than can be told--the crowds in so great a hurry to gather wood and faggots from the workshops and the baths, the Jews being especially zealous, as usual, to assist with this....And with his hands put behind him and tied, like a noble ram out of the great flock ready for sacrifice, a burnt offering ready and acceptable to God, he looked up to heaven and said:

"Lord God Almighty, Father of the beloved and blessed Servant Jesus Christ, ...I bless thee, because thou hast deemed me worthy of this day and hour, to take part in the number of martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for 'resurrection to eternal life' of the soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit; among whom may I be received in thy presence this day as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, just as thou has prepared and revealed beforehand and fulfilled, thou that art the true God without falsehood. For this and everything I praise thee, I bless thee, I glorify thee, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Servant, through whom be glory to thee with him and the Holy Spirit both now and unto the ages to come. Amen."

And when he had concluded the Amen and finished his prayer, the men attending to the fire light it....They were going to bind him to the stake. Leave me as I am, he said, for He who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails. So they left him loosely bound in the flames." Polycarp died for Christ.<sup>1</sup>

If someone you loved were led out by the local government officials and executed would you need some encouraging? Life without persecution is hard enough. Listen to some well know Christians:

"You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky." So wrote the man who was called in his day "The Greatest Preacher in the English-speaking World"—Dr. John Henry Jowett. He pastored leading churches, preached to huge congregations, and wrote books that were bestsellers.

"I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to." Those words were spoken in a sermon by Charles Haddon Spurgeon whose marvelous ministry in London made him perhaps the greatest preacher England ever produced.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, vol. 1 [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1976] pp. 76-77

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

Comforting or encouraging each other is such a vital New Testament ministry that the Scriptures use no less than 8 different words for this ministry.

comfort	109 times	parakaleo (3870) verb	beseech 43; comfort 23; exhort 21; desire 8; pray 6; intreat 3	2C1.4; 2.7; 13.11; E 6.22; C4.8; ITH 3.2; 4.18; 5.11; 2 TH 2.17
comfort	29 times	paraklesis (3874) noun	consolation 14; exhortation 8; comfort 6; intreaty 1	A9.31; R 15.4; 2C1.3,4; 7.4,13
comfort	4 times	paramutheonai (3888) verb	comfort	J11.19; 1Th 5.14
comfort	8 times	tharseo (2293) verb	cheer 5; comfort 3	Mt. 9.22; Mk 10.49; Lu 8.48
comfort	1 time	paramuthia (3889) noun		I C 14.3
comfort	1 time	paramuthion (3890) noun		Phil. 2.1
comfort	1 time	eupsuchoe (2174) verb		Phil. 2.19
comfort	1 time	paregoria (3931) verb		Col. 4.11

The Word of God speaks about comfort 66 times in 62 verses. Comfort is so vital to our lives. Who is involved in comforting? The whole Trinity is involved in comforting us?

- The Holy Spirit comforts in Acts 9:31 Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.
- God comforts in II Corinthians 1:3-4.
- God's Word is our great source of comfort in Romans 15:4.
- Christ comforts in Philippians 2:11.

The most comforting passage in the Word of God is in II Corinthians where the word "comfort is used 10 times in 5 verses. Note the origin of comfort:

1. v. 3 THE SOURCE OF COMFORT IS God's DEVOTION
2. v. 4 THE SHARING OF COMFORT is God's delight
3. v.5 THE SUPPLY OF COMFORT is God's department.
4. v.6 THE SECRET OF COMFORT is God's design
5. v.7 THE SECRET OF COMFORT is God's delivery

When are we candidates for comfort?

1. v. 8 when there is no way out
2. v. 9 When we come to the end of our selves
3. v. 10 When we look only to God
4. v. 11 When we ask for God's supply

But what if someone doesn't yield to the Holy Spirit prompted ministry of encouraging and comforting the body of Christ ? What if, to be specific, we won't let Christ transform our mind, control our body, and reveal our duty to minister in this way ? Well, let me read<sup>3</sup> from Paul Brandt and Phil Yancey classic...

Sometimes a dreaded thing occurs in the body--a mutiny-- resulting in a tumor...

A tumor is called benign if its effect is fairly localized and it stays within membrane boundaries. But the most traumatizing condition in the body occurs when DISLOYAL cells defy inhibition. They multiply without any checks on growth spreading rapidly throughout the body, choking out normal cells. White cells, armed against foreign invaders, will not attack the body's own mutinous cells. Physicians fear no other malfunction more deeply: it is called cancer. For still mysterious reasons, these cells--and they may be cells from the brain, liver, kidney, bone, blood, skin, or other tissues--grow wild, out of control. Each is a healthy, functioning cell, but disloyal, NO LONGER ACTING IN REGARD FOR THE REST OF THE BODY.

Even the white cells, the dependable palace guard, can destroy the body through rebellion. Sometimes they recklessly reproduce, clogging the bloodstream, overloading the lymph system, strangling the body's normal functions--such is leukemia.

Because I am a surgeon and not a prophet, I tremble to make the analogy between cancer in the physical body and mutiny in the spiritual body of Christ. But I must. In His warnings to the church, Jesus Christ showed no concern about the shocks and bruises His Body would meet from external forces. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against my church," He said flatly (Matthew 16:18). HE MOVED EASILY, UNTHREATENED, AMONG SINNERS AND CRIMINALS. BUT HE CRIED OUT AGAINST THE KIND OF DISLOYALTY THAT COMES FROM WITHIN.

Few doctrines are more important than the Church. Because of the constant attack, we need to be good students of the subject. Because we are fellow members of the Body, we need to apply ourselves to mutual harmony. And because disease can diminish the effectiveness of the Body, we must maintain habits of health and a consistent program of exercise in harmony with God's Bodybuilding program. Furthermore, a regular checkup by the Great Physician is a must. Not once a year but at least once a week. And be prepared for the cost of that visit.

God can encourage us by His Word and through His Spirit, but sometimes He uses other believers to give us the encouragement we need (2 Cor. 2:7-8; 7:6-7). How wonderful it would be if all of us had the nickname "Barnabas—son of encouragement"! (Acts 4:36)

Paul was never ashamed to ask Christians to pray for him. In at least seven of his letters, he mentioned his great need for prayer support (Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:18-19;

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<sup>3</sup> Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, p. 59-60.

Phil. 1:19; Col. 4:3; 1 Thes. 5:25; 2 Thes. 3:1; Phile. 22). Paul and the believers in Corinth were helping each other (2 Cor. 1:11, 24).

1. Romans 15:30-32 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,<sup>31</sup> that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,<sup>32</sup> that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.

Sing "Make me a blessing"