

God of All Merciful Comfort

Series: 2 Corinthians
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3-5
Date: July 14, 2013

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

2 Corinthians is the proclamation of a *Cruciform Ministry Worthy of Boasting: An Approved Service in Christ*. We have two opposing perspectives: the Corinthian fleshy, worldly, carnal, prideful way and Paul's way.¹ One way doesn't save nor is saving. Paul's way saves and is saving. Paul's way is a way that *knows him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death* (Philippians 3:10).

In this epistle we have two opposing ways to look at Paul (Christian or Pagan). We can *pity* Paul in his sufferings or we can give thanksgiving to God for either His deliverance or endurance. Paul says, *Blessed be God* for His merciful comfort in the midst of the sufferings of Christ, those sufferings that Christ endured while in an earthly body.

Thanksgiving Prayer (1:3-7)

- This *thanksgiving prayer (Blessed be God)* involves the topics that center in the second epistle to the Corinthians; that is, suffering (1:4, 5, 6, 7), comfort and deliverance (1:3, 4, 5, 6, 7), life and death (1:8, 9, 10), union (1:6, 11; Paul & Christ, Paul & Corinthians, Christ & Corinthians) – the way of the Cross. What we have is Paul thanking God for the very thing that his opponents utilized to call his ministry into question – his sufferings.²
- In this *thanksgiving prayer*, Paul uses the term for *affliction* to refer to both external and internal troubles that cause distress (7:5). They are the *sufferings of Christ* – the same sufferings Christ endured when He walked on this earth. Paul lists three *hardship* listings in the book of 2 Corinthians (4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:23–29).

God of Mercies & All Comfort (1:4-5)

- God-Father *lifts up the downcast* and *comes along-side to grant courageous encouragement* by Christ in all of our *troubles*. He *does not always* remove the trouble that is causing inner stress, anxiety, pain, crushing pressure, or depression. He *will always* lift your spirit and strengthen you in the midst of the stress, anxiety, pain, crushing pressure, or depression.
- If you are unable to bear the trouble, God-Father will remove it. If you need grace to bear the trouble, God-Father will strengthen and encourage you in Christ. The same comfort that Paul received is the same comfort that Paul gives to the church at Corinth that is suffering under the hands of false brethren (super-apostles). This comfort that comes to us from God-Father through the Messiah is exactly proportional (*just*) to the measure of our affliction. *This is always true* – no exceptions. Paul does pray for the removal of affliction but when the affliction is not removed then Paul thanks God-Father for the comfort (12:8-10; *Blessed be God*).

¹ Kar Yong Lim, *'The Sufferings of Christ Are Abundant in Us': a Narrative Dynamics Investigation of Paul's Sufferings in 2 Corinthians* (library of New Testament Studies), 1 ed. (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2009-08-11), 5.

² Richard C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of 2 Corinthians*, Lenski's Commentary on the New Testament (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2008), 812.

- The question at this point is, what is the comfort? Paul is going to *lift up the troubled Corinthians* and *come along-side them to grant courageous encouragement* by Christ. What comfort does he give them? Because whatever the comfort is, it will be the same comfort that we need in our weaknesses and troubles. It will be the same comfort that we will give to others no matter what the troubles are.
 1. The key that unlocks this comfort is hinted at (and developed in 2 Corinthians) by the phrases, *by Christ* and *sufferings of Christ*.
 2. The first truth to recall is that we are *in Christ*; that is, we are union in Him and in union with one another. *We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones* (Ephesians 5:30). *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. The members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it* (1 Corinthians 12:27, 25b-26). We are in Him and in one another. Our lives affect the live of the church.
 3. Our abundant *consolation* is balanced to the abundance of the *sufferings* (2 Corinthians 1:5). *The abundance of the sufferings of Christ in Paul is proportional to the abundance of the consolation [i.e., of Christ] in Paul.*
 4. What is the comfort? It is the same comfort that Christ received from His Father in the midst of His sufferings; that is, *endurance* and *deliverance*. The comfort from the Father was the assurance, the confident expectation, of the Father's commitment and ability to deliver him, even from death. "What God did for Jesus in his suffering, Paul is confident God will do for him, and what God will do for Paul, he will do for all who trust in God."³
- In our troubles, the sufferings of Christ, the Spirit of Christ manifests Himself. In this, God's glory in Christ is realized and seen. This is what living for the glory of God consists. This give us further insight into Romans 5:3-8.
- God graciously sends trouble and consolation to his ministers for the purpose of enabling them to be a help, blessing, and comfort to the people of God, the church.⁴ The trials of a church and the comfort it receives define its ministry. The trouble of a pastor and the comfort he receives is for the comfort of the church. The troubles of individual members of the body of Christ and the comfort they receive are for the comfort of the church. Each member is to express an ever-growing confident expectation of the Father's commitment and the ability to deliver them, even in deaths. This is our comfort and the comfort we give to others as they watch our lives in Christ – the life of God in the soul of man!
- Do you believe the promise of God to provide you *salvation* in all things? *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously* (1 Peter 2:21-23). The answer to wrongful suffering is committing ourselves to the Father who judges righteously. The answer is not, merely not reviling, not threatening.

³ Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians* (Zondervan, 2000), 62.

⁴ Lenski, *2 Corinthians*, 812.