

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Intro:

--We know that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (**1 Cor. 16:8**) but was driven out from there shortly after. From Ephesus he traveled to Troas intending to revisit the churches he founded in Macedonia and then go again to Corinth (**Acts 20:1-2**).

--Paul had planned to meet with Titus at Troas to hear about what was happening in Corinth but it didn't work out (**2 Cor. 2:13**) and Titus eventually met up with him somewhere else (**2 Cor. 7:6**) and gives him mostly good news that 1 Corinthians was received well.

--The majority of the church obeyed his letter and understood his heart (**2 Cor. 2:6 + 7:13-16**) and responded to correction and instruction with godly sorrow. Though, there remained an element in the church that slandered him personally, his apostleship, and ministry.

--Eventually, Paul did reach Corinth and stayed there for three months (**Acts 20:2-3**). This may have all taken place in something like 6 months.

--It is in that interval between Titus' return to Paul and Paul's arrival at Corinth that the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to write 2 Corinthians and send it back with Titus (**2 Cor. 8:6**).

--Timothy, had also been sent to Corinth (**1 Cor. 4:17**) and seems to have arrived back with Paul (**2 Cor. 1:1**). We don't hear much about his information on what was transpiring in Corinth so was likely similar to Titus'.

--This information helps us see that the letter is written with a background of majority acceptance and minority conflict. That is why Paul writes much differently than his very organized and specified first epistle. In 2 Corinthians we find him sharing much more of his heart, life, and motives in free conversation Vs. The point by point instruction of issues that we find in 1 Corinthians.

--In many ways it is in 2 Corinthians we see and learn more of the life of God in Paul personally than any of his other letters save maybe 2 Timothy.

--J.I. Packer calls this *a harrowing letter to read!*

--With that said, I think the best general outline would be:

- 1) Chapters 1-5: Explanation: Paul as minister
- 2) Chapters 6-9: Exhortation: Paul as spiritual father
- 3) Chapters 10-13: Vindication: Paul as apostle

Verses 1-2:

--Here is a typical Pauline greeting.

--His apostleship—which was constantly under attack by men—is true **by the will of God**. God's will is a safe and confident place for us to stand!

--Timothy is mentioned, no doubt, because he was just with the church at Corinth. His presence would also give credence to Paul's response as Timothy would have given the apostle firsthand accounts of things said and done.

--**Achaia** was basically southern Greece and Corinth was the chief city. This epistle would go farther than Corinth alone.

--Where can any human possibly find grace and peace outside of **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**?!

--Notice also the family bonds that are recognized by Paul in language such as: **our brother; all the saints; God our Father, etc.** These are bonds that are true in Christ irrespective of practical outworking.

Verses 3-4:

--**Blessed** is a unique word in the Greek that has the idea of *praise*. It is used only of God in the NT: (Lk. 1:68; Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 2 Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3).

Mark 14:61: But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

--**Mercies** has the idea of *compassion*. (Ps. 85:5+15; Micah 7:18-19)

Daniel 9:9: To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.

--The Greek word for **comfort** is *paraklesis* and has the idea of encouragement or coming alongside someone to hold them up.

Acts 4:36: And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement)

--We also know that this was the role and name given to the Holy Spirit.

John 16:7: Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

--The word for **tribulation** in the Greek is *thlipsis* and is the same word that Jesus uses in **John 16:21+33** when He likens our trials to that of a woman in labor who forgets them once the child is born, and when He reminds us that; **In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**

--Also, in verses **4-8**, Paul uses five different Greek words for various troubles, each with their own slant. He is giving us a broad spectrum of hard times in life. This tells us that God's comfort and encouragement covers everything.

--Now, we might wish this passage said: *God of all comfort, who comforts us by keeping us from all tribulation!* But that has never been the Biblical promise. Though, we are taught some important things about Biblical comfort and encouragement here.

--God does not promise us deliverance from all tribulations. He does not promise the miraculous if we only have enough faith. What He does promise us is that His compassionate comfort and encouragement will hold us up and overflow *in and through* all tribulations.

--It is important for us to see and understand the type of comfort that God promises to us through this inspired Word.

--We will all face trials and tribulations and afflictions in this life and many stumble and are offended because they have false expectations or low expectations when it comes to God's goodness expressed in the middle of a sinful world.

--So what is God teaching us?

--First, we are to see that our comfort comes primarily from God.

--Paul makes it clear that it is the **God of all comfort** coming to us in **all our tribulation**. All trials meet with the resources of the All-sufficient One.

--The comfort that God offers is that of His compassionate coming alongside of us in the work of Christ through the life of the Holy Spirit. What do we learn from the Scriptures about God's comfort in the life of the early persecuted church?

--We are told in Acts, shortly after Paul's conversion, that the early persecuted church knew this comfort well.

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.

--We see here that the comfort promised from God our Father came through the Holy Spirit. It is a comfort that comes from outside of us and our present circumstances. Comfort that comes from beyond the natural—from the supernatural.

--Paul prays that the believers in Thessalonica would know this work of the Holy Spirit. They too were a persecuted church.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17: Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

--Isn't this beautiful? The comfort that comes from God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is a comfort based on everlasting things! That means it cannot be stolen or drained by anything in the natural.

--Finally, the writer to of Hebrews, speak of God's comfort to that persecuted group as well.

Hebrews 6:18: That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

--Here we see that our comfort is strong because He is strong! He is unchanging. He cannot lie. Therefore, our comfort is unchanging and cannot be false.

--Am I seeking my comfort from a natural source (Family or Friends, etc.) or from the Holy Spirit?

--Am I seeking my comfort from passing things or everlasting things (Money, Homes, Jobs, Alcohol, Drugs, Vaps, Weed, etc)? What happens when I lose my material things?

--Am I seeking my comfort from things that are weak (Music, Movies, Sentimental moments, etc.) or in the strength of God and His Word?

--Am I seeking comfort that is not from the God of all comfort? I will not find what He has not promised. If you don't like it, fine, but there is nothing else. This is the *only* actual comfort that there is.

--Is that to say that human beings play no part in this? Certainly not! Paul makes it clear 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 as well, through this whole section of **3-7** we have the words ***us + we + our*** over and over again. This means that this ministry of sharing compassions and comfort is given to all of us! There is no shortage of broken hearts, broken homes, broken fellowships, and broken lives. These moments surround all of us where we realize it or not.

--But the question remains: *What type of comfort does God want us to give?* The clear answer is: *The comfort that we have first received from Him as the God of all comfort.*

--To offer anything else is in fact to harm and not help someone. People don't need us. They need God. There is only one Savior and it isn't you or I.

--We don't offer deliverance! Deliverance is not the comfort spoken of here. We give the comfort that God gives to us. We emulate the coming alongside of God. We encourage through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the everlasting nature of God's promises, and the inner strengthening that we have found in Him.

--What comfort or encouragement did Paul bring to these Corinthians or persecuted Christians all through the early church? He, who had endured so much suffering—more than most—could look them in the eye and say:

I was never forsaken of God.

I was never left to my own strength.

When I had lost all hope in me I found hope in Him.

I never needed to see the whole picture. When things didn't work out as I wanted I was blessed to find them as God wanted.

His strength was made perfect in my weakness.

He is with you always, even until the end of the age.

--We comfort others with God and in God.

--This ministry is not limited only to the people who have gone through the same specific types of sufferings—loss of spouse, martyrs, suicide, addictions, disease, etc. though that is in itself a wonderful thing. Even then, no two circumstances are the same.

--What is the same? ***The God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation!***

--It is wonderful when a human being comes alongside of us and puts their arm around us. Even though we know they cannot do anything to change our circumstances. It is a more wonderful thing to know God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ sympathize with us and also have the power to deliver *from* or *through* as it so pleases Him!

--That is how we comfort others. We are no man's Savior. But we do know who is.

--There is another weird idea out there sometimes that only someone who has sinned can comfort or encourage another sinner. But the truth is that the Bible teaches us that it is The Man with no sin who best sympathizes with our needs.

Hebrews 4:15: For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Verses 5-7:

--(5-6) The question here is are **the sufferings of Christ** that Paul is speaking of suffering *for Christ* or suffering *with Christ*? ***Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? . . . I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting (Acts 9:4-5).***

--I think this is probably one of those both-and type of questions. We know that Paul knew the reality of Christ's suffering through His church but Paul also knew that he was called into the fellowship of that suffering in a specific way (**Acts 9:16; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24**).

--Part of Paul's service to God was that he could look at any brother or sister in tribulation and confidently speak to them of the mercies of God. He knew from experience that where sin would abound grace would much more abound! Believers were supposed to look at Paul's life and actively see the comfort and salvation of God. *Like the difference between watching a skilled boxer training Vs. Actually fighting while taking blows*

--Some are called as a servant of God through the ministry of **affliction** and **consolation**. Job was named by God: **My servant Job (Job 2:3; 42:7-8)**. But what did Job do? He suffered and looked for consolation from God.

--What are we told of Jesus Christ? **He is despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3).**

--Some are called to this ministry more than others. I think of Adoniram Judson; David Livingstone; Joni Erickson; etc. None escape it completely. All of us experience afflictions in some measure. **It is for your consolation and salvation.**

--(7) Whatever fearful thought we might have of future sufferings and afflictions (and we all do!), Paul trusted more in the consolation. We can find confidence in suffering. Not in ourselves but in the **God of all comfort.**

--What does it look like for us to *trust* God? It looks like loving God more than fearing for ourselves.

--There will always be something of a mystery as to why God allows evil things to happen to His children in this world. But this is part of the answer the Bible gives us when we struggle with how a God of power and love can allow certain evils or afflictions. *And remember, everyone has to answer that question, even the atheist!*

--This is one of the main differences between the saved and unsaved in the sufferings and afflictions of this life. The unsaved are alone. Their suffering doesn't help them or others. It is meaningless. It has no harvest, no reward, no future, no purpose.

--We, on the other hand, are not alone. Our Father, the God of all mercies, is with us. Our sufferings can please Him and strengthen us and others. They mean something in God's purposes and in His eternal kingdom. And in the end, our sufferings will not be worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

--This is the battle of faith that is tied to our suffering here on earth.

*Lewis (A Grief Observed): *"Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer.'**

--Fortunately, for Lewis and the Corinthians, Paul was confident that the God who came alongside of him and held him up in all his sufferings would do the same for them and us!

Verses 8-11:

--There are many guesses as to the specific dangers Paul is referencing here but he is not specific so there is no sense in speculating. The list of dangers he faced was no doubt legion.

--What Paul does tell us, is that he faced so much trouble, that he and his companions ***despaired even of life!*** Paul says they had the ***sentence (or answer) of death in ourselves.***

--Paul is not speaking about suicide here. He is saying that they basically had given up hope of living. If you asked them, *What is going to happen?* The answer was, *Death!*

--Yet Paul, in looking back, sees that God allowed them that type of suffering so that they would lose all confidence in themselves (maybe in our day I should say lose all hope of controlling or manipulating the circumstances in their own power) and hope only in God who can and does deliver.

--**(11)** The Greek word that Paul uses for ***helping together*** is used only there in the NT. It basically means to help or assist.

--Paul makes it clear that intercessory prayers contribute to comfort and deliverance.

--This is how we can be involved in many lives and situations. This is how the Bible calls us to be helpers. Prayer matters.