

Care For The Troubled Heart

The opening of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is unusual. After stating his greetings from himself and Timothy, and expressing God's grace to the readers, he exalted the comfort he had received from God (vv. 3-7). "Comfort," used 10 times in this text and translated as "comfort/comforteth" and "consolation," causes someone to be encouraged or consoled (Acts 13:15; Ephesians 6:22; Philippians 2:1). His encouragement came in the form of deliverance from a distressing experience in Asia (vv. 8-10), and for the Corinthians' righteous response to his harsh letter about their conduct surrounding the immoral man (7:5-11).

Because of his personal need, he was glad to highlight two aspects of God's character he had come to value in deeper measure: God's limitless compassion (Psalm 145:9; Micah 7:19) and never-failing comfort (Isaiah 40:1; 51:3, 12; 66:13). To experience God's consolation and encouragement in the midst of all one's affliction is to become indebted and equipped to communicate the divine comfort to others in any kind of affliction or distress. Whenever Christ's sufferings were multiplied in Paul's life, God's comfort was also multiplied through Paul's work in Christ. The greater the suffering, the greater the comfort and the greater the ability to share with others the divine sympathy.

One way that God can comfort us is through His holy scriptures. The people who went through suffering record, via inspiration, their deepest thoughts. For example, the beautiful shepherd psalm can lift the broken heart: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (23:1-6). The record of Christ's words assure me of God's care. He said, "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?" (Luke 12:24).

A second way that God can comfort us is seeing that the people of the scriptures had difficulties in their lives, assuring me that there is "no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Romans 15:4 is truly applicable here: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." The use of the scriptures promotes "patience" and supplies "comfort." Both may be learned by precept and example from the records of the past. These two elements are intimately connected with "hope," for the endurance is worthwhile if it takes place on a course that leads to a glorious future, and the encouragement provides exactly that assurance. For example, David, one of the greatest men in the Old Testament, had to endure a gruesome amount of suffering: (1) he was hunted by a jealous king; (2) he had to leave his best friend; (3) he had to face the death of three children and the rape of another; and, (4) he had to live through

the guilt of committing sin against God with Bathsheba. But David was not alone. Elijah was lonely (1 Kings 19:18), Hezekiah was sick (2 Kings 20:1), and Hannah was barren (1 Samuel 1:10). If God can help these worthy people can make it through their suffering, He will help me through my suffering.

A third way for God to providentially comfort us is through faithful, spiritual brethren. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." These "burdens" are heavy — they are crushing, emotional weights that we feel cannot be carried any longer. In fact, we may not even want to go on living. After the vicious trip across the Mediterranean Sea, fearing for his life because of the shipwreck, Paul came to Italy and Acts 28:15 says, "And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." You can only imagine how much these brethren would have meant to them in that moment! These "burdens" are different than the "burden" of Galatians 6:5. The word in that verse was a load which one is expected to bear. It was used as a military term for a man's pack or a soldier's kit.

When our hearts are brought low by any of the aforementioned reasons, let the "God of all comfort" comfort you. Call Him to your side and let Him give you the strength to handle all the troubling issues of your life. He cares for you and loves you, and wants to bless, not curse. Philippians 4:6-7 promises, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." As we have been comforted, let us then turn and be a comfort for others like Paul was so willing to do.

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