

“The God Of All Comfort ...”

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3).

Paul’s salutation to the Corinthians is his usual greeting. He identifies himself as an apostle of Christ (a designation of himself found in eight of his 13 letters), then he includes Timothy as joining with him in the letter to them: a courtesy shown to various ones in sundry letters — Sosthenes in his first letter to Corinth; Silas and Timothy in the two letters to the Thessalonians and Timothy in five or six of his other letters. The slight difference in this greeting is that this letter is expanded from being addressed to the church of God in Corinth to include also “all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia” indicating, of course, that other congregations were in Achaia beside that of Corinth. The conclusion, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 2), is identical with his first letter.

Titus, the bearer of the first letter and very likely the messenger dispatched to deliver this second one, is not mentioned until 2:13. But while he is not mentioned, it was his reaching Paul somewhere in Macedonia with his report as to the reception of Paul's first letter that brought forth such jubilation and thanksgiving; repeatedly expressed by the word “comfort” or a form of that word. No matter that there was still an element that Paul would later address in sternest terms and warnings — Titus was safe and far the greatest part, his letter had had the intended effect he wished for it upon them. They had repented.

No less than 10 times in the course of five verses does the word “comfort” appear. The first thing the apostle did was to magnify (bless) God for the comfort He had been the source of. God was the Father of mercies and God of all comfort! Paul had passed through trying times indeed. He had written a letter out of the anguish of his heart to the Corinthians addressing a number of serious ills, and he was uncertain how they would receive that letter. Shortly after having sent Titus to Corinth a great riot erupted in Ephesus, ignited by one Demetrius, a silversmith (Acts 19:23-29). So dangerous was the situation that, although Paul would have entered the fray, his disciples and certain of the Asiarch (his friends) urged him not venture into the theatre (Acts 19:31). During this period he despaired even of life (2 Cor. 1:8). He left the city with a heavy heart traveling on to Troas where he expended to find Titus, but Titus was not there and although a great opportunity was open there for the word, Paul was too distraught to remain. He hastened on into Macedonia, looking for and desiring the coming of Titus (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Somewhere in Macedonia the two made contact with each other and how relieved, how grateful, and how blessed Paul regarded himself to be and God was the source of it all!

So Paul exults “who comforteth us in all of our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ” (2 Cor. 1:4-5). Yet, although God comforted Paul in all

his afflictions that was not to say God removed all afflictions from off him. To the contrary, those afflictions would persist and even intensify. If he escaped the danger of the riot in Ephesus, he traveled right into Corinth where a plot was laid against his life by Jews there (Acts 20:3). Backtracking to Macedonia and then to Troas, Assos, and Mitylene, he came to Miletus and called for the Ephesian elders to meet him there. In the course of his discourse to them he said that the Holy Spirit testified to him in every city "saying that bonds and afflictions abide me" (Acts 20:23). But while his afflictions were not removed, God comforted him with the knowledge that all was not lost; his efforts at Corinth were not in vain. Yes, Satan's angels had tried to disrupt and destroy his work but the word of God through his letter to them, had had its staying power for the tide had turned; the church to the larger measure had turned back to the faith. This knowledge was his comfort. Tribulations abounded, yes; but grace and comfort abounded more!

Jim McDonald