

The God of All Comfort

“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). We all have troubles and sorrows. We all feel the need to be comforted when troubled and struggling with sadness. To be comforted is to be made to feel at ease during times of grief, sorrow, or trouble. To console is to provide strength, hope, and encouragement to the depressed.

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When the Apostle Paul wrote the second canonical letter to Corinth, he began by blessing the “God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). What did Paul mean? Is God really a God of comfort? Does God really comfort us in all our tribulations, and if so, how? Does not God Himself sometimes bring trouble? Is God’s comfort conditional? How does God’s comfort enable us to comfort others?

Paul’s description of God as the “God of all comfort” is understandable within the historical context of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Some tensions had developed between Paul and the Corinthian church. After Paul had written a previous letter to Corinth, he observed that “even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry” (2 Corinthians 7:8). Paul determined not to go to Corinth again “in sorrow,” noting that “out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears” (2 Corinthians 2:1, 4). Titus had apparently been sent to Corinth to ascertain whether those tensions had eased. Paul waited for Titus to report back to him about how the Corinthians now perceived him and his message. He had hoped to meet Titus in Troas, but not finding him there and having no rest in his spirit, he departed for Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). When Paul met Titus, he was comforted by “God, who comforts the downcast, not only by his [Titus] coming, but also by the consolation with which he [Titus] was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more” (2 Corinthians 7:7). Moreover, Paul wrote, “we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all” (2 Corinthians 7:13). Paul had suffered from tensions between himself and the Corinthian brethren. Now Titus’ message brought him comfort. Paul attributed the comfort he received as coming from God. He could now return to Corinth realizing that peace would exist between himself and the Corinthian brethren.

Many have realized that God gives comfort in troublesome times. David declared that “the LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9). “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). Isaiah exhorted, “Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted” (Isaiah 49:13). Luke observed that following a period of persecution, “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” (Acts 9:31).

To be comforted does not mean that there will be no trouble. Rather, to be comforted implies that trouble has preceded comfort. In the same letter that Paul wrote about the comfort of God, he wrote about “trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure,

above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). He also acknowledged other troubles. “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:24-28).

Generally, God brings sorrow on those who reject him, but comforts those who seek him. The principle is that “by transgression an evil man is snared, but the righteous sings and rejoices” (Proverbs 29:6). “The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead” (Proverbs 11:8). Because of Eve’s disobedience, God told her, “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception” (Genesis 3:16). Through the prophet Jeremiah, God said he would bring trouble upon the people of Judah because of the sins of their rulers, for failing to heed God’s word, and for disobedience to God’s ordinance regarding liberty (Jeremiah 15:4; 24:9; 29:18; 34:17). The righteous are comforted because God delivers them from their troubles. “The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble” (Psalm 37:39). “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

The righteous find comfort in the word of God. David declared that “Your word has given me life” (Psalm 119:50). “How sweet are Your words to my taste . . . Through Your precepts I get understanding . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:103-105). “Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant” (Psalm 119:76).

Specifically, the comfort from God about which Paul wrote to the Corinthians must be understood within the context of his sufferings for Christ. After Paul wrote that God “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted,” he then wrote, “for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:4-5). Paul understood that his afflictions were because of his service in Christ for the consolation and salvation of others, and that therefore his comfort was also in Christ for the consolation and salvation of others (2 Corinthians 1:6). Hence, “our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation (2 Corinthians 1:7). Paul’s suffering for the sake of Christ and his subsequent comfort in Christ were examples for others by which they could be comforted in their own sufferings for the sake of Christ.

In this life, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). But when this life is over, the Lord will come and meet his saints in the air. “And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). John wrote that in the heavenly life to come, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Now, that’s comforting!