

The God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1

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Today, we are going to start taking a look at Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. It was written within a year of the first letter. In addition to the problems Paul addressed in the first letter, this letter deals with the distrust some in the church had for Paul, both his sincerity and whether he really had apostolic authority. So, this epistle is very personal and autobiographical. This first chapter focuses on an important theological concept that we can apply daily: our God is The God of all Comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:1-2 – Introduction

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul introduced himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ because the Corinthians needed to remember and recognize his apostolic credentials. He added *by the will of God* to strengthen the point. Paul was not an apostle by the decision or desire of any man, including himself.

- He was an apostle *by the will of God*.

It is not just apostles who have their vocation by the will of God. Since God is in control, you could say that about whatever God has arranged for you to do.

- There was a time when I was a Product Marketing Engineer at Texas Instruments by the will of God.
- Today, I'm blessed to be a Bible study leader and landlord by the will of God.

You can serve God and be a blessing to others where ever you find yourself.

Paul refers to the Corinthians as saints which is remarkable considering their many problems.

- We often use the term **saints** in a different way today, applying it to the "super-spiritual" instead of those who are simply set apart by a relationship of trust in Jesus Christ.

This letter of 2 Corinthians was directed to *all the saints who are in all Achaia* showing that Paul intended his letters to be shared among the churches.

- They weren't just for the Christians in the city of Corinth but for all the Christians in the region.
- I doubt if Paul had sharing this letter with Alpine, Texas in mind, but God certainly did.

The greeting of *grace* and *peace* are familiar greetings of Paul (used in all 13 of his New Testament letters).

- "Grace to you," was the typical Greek greeting and "peace" was the typical Jewish greeting, shalom.

Paul saying that this *grace* and *peace* are *from God our Father* reminds us that we are children of God, yet not in the same sense as Jesus is the Son of God.

- We are children of God, not by nature, but by election; not by ancestry but by adoption; not by merit but by redemption.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – Praise to the God

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and 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.

Paul opens this letter by praising the God who gives mercy and comfort to all believers.

- We get the sense that Paul knows the mercy and comfort of God on a first-hand basis.

The reference to the Lord Jesus Christ is not just His name. Jesus is His name; Christ is His title meaning "anointed of God" and is synonymous with the Hebrew term Messiah. The term Lord is both a title and it signifies relationship.

The words **all comfort** in this passage come from the ancient Greek word *paraklesis*.

- The idea behind this word for **comfort** is way more than just soothing sympathy.
- It refers to strengthening, helping, and making strong.

Paul here considers the Father a comforter, a Paraclete.

- Other passages tell us that the Holy Spirit is also our Paraclete (John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7) and that God the Son is our Paraclete as well (1 John 2:1, Hebrews 2:18, Luke 2:25).

God, in every aspect of His being, is full of comfort, strength, and help for us.

One great purpose of God in comforting us is to enable us to bring comfort to others.

- God's comfort can be given and received through others.
- Even *spiritual* comforts are not given us for our benefit alone; they, like all the gifts of God, are given that they may be instruments of help to others.

As we experience comfort from God in the midst of our suffering, this enables us to encourage others in their suffering by sharing with them how God comforted us.

- And it does not need to be the same kind of suffering either.

2 Corinthians 1:5-7 – Paul's suffering experience

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And 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.

The word consolation is not one we use much today. It is a noun meaning the comfort received or what it is that brings comfort. It comes from the verb console which means taking action to make someone feel better. The word consolation is basically synonymous with the word comfort.

Paul had a life filled with suffering. He described some of these sufferings...

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 – *stripes... prisons... beatings... stonings... shipwrecked... perils of waters... 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.*

Paul knew that all his sufferings in the course of his ministry were really *the sufferings of Christ*.

And Paul also recognized that the comfort he received was from Christ.

- Jesus was not distant from Paul in his trials.
- Jesus was right there with Paul, identifying with the apostle and comforting him.

This is a principle we can count on... when sufferings *abound*, *comfort also abounds*. Jesus is there to comfort us if we will just receive it.

- Of course, this assumes we are not suffering as a consequence for sin as is pointed out in 1 Peter 4:15-16

God may allow situations in our life where our only *comfort* is found *through Christ*.

- Sometimes we think our only comfort will be found in a change of circumstances, but God wants to console us right in the midst of our difficult circumstances, and to do it *through Christ*.
- Sometimes I think, the Lord just needs to return... I find that thought comforting because it would certainly bring an end to my suffering.
- But even if He doesn't return right away, knowing that the day will come when my circumstances will be way better helps me endure in the here and now..

If Paul was afflicted, it was for the sake of God's people (like the Corinthian Christians).

- God had a larger purpose in Paul's suffering than just working on Paul himself.
- God brought *comfort and salvation* to others through Paul's sufferings.
- Paul recognized that his suffering brought him closer to Jesus relying on God alone thus making him a more effective minister.

It occurred to me that it is dangerous to pray, "Lord, just use me to touch the lives of others."

- Through this good prayer, we invite God to bring suffering into our lives if that is what makes us more able to bring *comfort and salvation* to others.

Paul writes of *the same sufferings*. It is unlikely the Corinthians were suffering in exactly the same way Paul did. Probably, not one of them could match the list Paul made in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.

- While the sufferings of others were not the same as Paul, he recognized the importance of what God did through the suffering.
- Christians should never get into a "competition" of comparing suffering. There is a sense in which we all share the same sufferings.
- We all have our crosses to bear as Jesus pointed out in Luke 9:23.

Of course, sometimes it is in fact a comfort to compare our sufferings to those of others — to see how *light* our burden really is!

The New Testament idea of suffering is broad and not limited to just one kind of trouble (like persecution).

- The Greek word for suffering (*thlip-sis*) originally had the idea of actual physical pressure.

God's desire is that we would be **enduring** through our suffering. The Greek word for **enduring** is *hu-po-mone*.

- It isn't the idea of passive, bleak acceptance, but of the kind of spirit that can triumph over pain and suffering to achieve the goal.
- It is the spirit of the marathon runner, not as someone enduring the dentist's chair.

We see Paul living here in the footsteps of Jesus, who was truly an *others-centered person*. Paul's life was not focused on himself, but on the Lord and on those whom the Lord had given him to serve.

- When Paul suffered, it was so that God can do something good in the Corinthian Christians.
- When Paul was comforted, it was so that God can bless the Corinthian Christians.

Suffering or comforted, it wasn't all about Paul; it was all about the others to whom he ministered.

According to many passages in the New Testament, suffering is promised in the Christian life (Acts 14:22, 1 Thessalonians 3:3, Philippians 1:29, Romans 5:3).

- Nevertheless, we are also promised comfort in the midst of our suffering.

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 – Paul's desperate trouble

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our 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, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

We don't know the exact nature of Paul's trouble. It was probably some type of persecution or a physical affliction made worse by his missionary work.

Whatever the problem was, it was bad. Because of this problem, Paul lived with the awareness that he might die at any time.

Paul wrote here: *That we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead*: Even though the resurrection is a future event, there is a sense in which the reality and power of the resurrection helps the suffering Christian in the here and now.

- As I mentioned before, the thought I often have in the midst of my own suffering that, "the Lord just needs to return" ...this certainly is also when I'll be resurrected!

Paul used three different tenses here for our deliverance: it is God *Who delivered us... and does deliver us... we trust that He will still deliver us*: God's work in our lives happens in the past, present, and future...

- We were justified by His work on the cross
- We are being sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit in us
- We will be glorified to have a physical body like Jesus has right now when we are resurrected.

It is also clear from this passage that Paul knew the value of intercessory prayer and was not shy about asking the Corinthians, even with their many spiritual problems, to pray for him.

- The Corinthians were *helping together* with Paul when they prayed for him.

2 Cor 1:12-14 – Paul's integrity in ministry

For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In this section, Paul defended himself against the accusation that he was insincere and unreliable.

- Here, he simply states that he has a clear conscience before God and trusts that the Corinthians will understand this.

The Corinthians were so accustomed to dealing with ministers who were calculating and manipulative, they figured Paul must be the same way.

- When Paul said he was coming to them (1 Cor 16:5) but did not, they figured he was insincere.
- Paul lets them know this was not the case.
- The Corinthians had become *cynical*. They believed that everyone had bad motives and were just out for personal gain and power.

Paul was looking forward to boasting of the Corinthians who would be with him in heaven during the Day of the Lord Jesus. This Day of the Lord Jesus is when all Christians will be resurrected.

- The Corinthians themselves would be able to boast of Paul because he was the one who introduced them to Jesus.

2 Cor 1:15-17 – The accusation that he was unreliable

And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?

The Corinthians accused Paul of being unreliable and untrustworthy because he said he would come at a certain time and did not. He was unable to come as planned, so instead he sent a letter.

- And, as a result, we are benefiting from this letter of Second Corinthians today!

In 1 Cor 16:5-7 Paul promised to see the Corinthians after his trip through Macedonia.

- He changed his plans and decided to see them first on his way to Macedonia and then again after leaving Macedonia, to give them a second benefit (per verses 15-16).

Paul made the first visit on the way to Macedonia, but it was painful for both him and the Corinthians because it was full of confrontation (*I would not come again to you in sorrow*, 2 Corinthians 2:1).

- After his visit on the way to Macedonia, Paul (or his representative) was openly insulted by someone from the "anti-Paul" contingent in Corinth (2 Cor 2:5-10, 7:12).
- Because the first visit was so unpleasant and sensing no benefit in a second visit, Paul abandoned his plan to see them on the way back from Macedonia.

Paul sent Titus from Ephesus to Corinth with a letter (2 Cor 2:3-9) which has been referred to as the "severe letter" written between 1st & 2nd Corinthians.

- This "severe letter" was lost to history so I suspect that it was not sufficiently inspired.
- Titus was also in Corinth to receive the contribution for the church in Judea (2 Cor 8:6, 8:16-17) but the Corinthians didn't give as they should have (2 Cor 8:10-11, 9:5).

Paul then went to Macedonia and among other things, he organized a collection for the needy Christians in Judea.

- Titus met Paul in Macedonia, and told him about the Corinthian response to the "severe letter" (2 Cor 7:5-7).
- Later from Macedonia, Paul wrote 2nd Corinthians when he heard of the problems at Corinth.

Paul wrote, *when I was planning this, did I do it lightly?*

The Corinthian Christians accused Paul of being unfaithful to his word insisting that if he was a man of integrity, he would have come in person.

- Paul's change in plans made the Corinthians say that he must be a man who says **Yes** but means **No** and says **No** but means **Yes**.

It was all right for the Corinthian Christians to be disappointed that Paul didn't come and visit them.

- But they were wrong in trying to *blame* Paul for the disappointment. They needed to see Paul's heart and God's hand in the circumstances.

2 Cor 1:18-22 – Reasons for false accusations

But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Paul in effect said, "*As God is faithful*, so we were faithful in what we said to you."

- Paul was such a man of integrity that he could liken his truthfulness to God's faithfulness.
- Paul did not say **Yes** and mean **No** or say **No** and mean **Yes**, as the Corinthians accused him because God would not do that.

Certainly, Jesus commanded us...

Matthew 5:37 – *let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one*

It is very important for Christians to keep our promises because if we don't, it gives people a false impression of Jesus Christ whom we represent.

Paul pointed out that *Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us... was not Yes and No*: Paul represented Jesus as being completely reliable and worthy of trust.

- It wasn't right for the apostle of such a faithful Savior to be so quickly considered unreliable and untrustworthy himself.

Paul said, *all the promises of God in Him are Yes*: Can we imagine God the Father ever saying "no" to God the Son? God the Father will always say **Yes** to the Son and will always affirm what the Son says.

And Paul reminded them, *He who establishes us... and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit*: Paul and his associates were commissioned by God and filled with the Holy Spirit.

- Understanding this should have made the Corinthian Christians reject hasty and unfounded accusations against Paul.

Paul here refers to three aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in us...

He has anointed us: The only other place where the New Testament speaks about anointing by the Holy Spirit is in 1 John 2:20 and 2:27.

- Every use of this term speaks of an anointing that is common to all believers, not a special anointing for a few Christian superstars.
- The idea behind being anointed is that we are prepared and empowered for service.

The 2nd aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in us is that... He **sealed us**: In the ancient world, a seal was used to *identify* and to *protect*.

- If something was **sealed**, everyone knew who it belonged to (the seal had an insignia), and the seal prevented others from tampering with the item.
- The Holy Spirit is in us to *identify* us and to *protect* us.

The 3rd aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in us is that... He is our **guarantee**: The word **guarantee** is the word for a down payment.

- We have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment for the fullness of what God will do.
- The Holy Spirit is a pledge of greater things to come... the resurrection of our body and soul.

2 Cor 1:23-24 – Other reasons for false accusations

Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

Paul here makes a serious oath. While Jesus said we should live our lives in such a way that oaths are not necessary (Matthew 5:33-37), it does not mean that oaths are prohibited. On occasion, even God swears an oath as He promised Abraham (per Hebrews 6:13).

The Corinthians had assumed that Paul did not come in person because of selfish reasons thinking he was not a man of integrity or was just afraid of conflict.

- Paul sets them straight: *to spare you I came no more*.
- Paul insists that it was out of concern for the Corinthians that he did not make the visit at that particular time.

By saying Paul and his associates did not have *dominion over the faith* of the Corinthians, Paul is pointing out that he is no one's lord in the church, even though he is an apostle.

Sadly, there are far too many that are entirely willing to take dominion over other believers in a manner that Paul would not even consider.

Instead of seeing himself as some kind of "lord" over the Corinthians, Paul gives a great description of what ministers should be: **fellow workers**.

- Leaders among Christians should work alongside their people so that their joy would increase.

Alright, what comments or applications do you see from this 1st Chapter of 2nd Corinthians?

In summary, I see the following applications:

- Our suffering & comfort has a purpose: to help others in their suffering.
- Our having the right attitude about our suffering helps us endure it.
- It is God who is our Comforter, and we are called to likewise be comforters of others.
- Since we represent Christ, we must conduct ourselves with integrity so that our yes is yes and our no, no.