

Romans 15:4-6 (NKJV)

4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Patience means steadfastness, constancy, endurance, a patient steady waiting for, a patient enduring, sustaining.

Some people don't fish because they say they don't have the patience. By that they mean that they don't like to sit and wait for something to happen. That is not the kind of patience this verse is talking about. It is not about the ability to **be still** while waiting for something in the future.

This word for patience has its synonym as **endurance**. In fact in some translations the word is translated endurance.

I was trying to think of an example of endurance. I would guess that many of us have read Tolkeins book the Lord of the Rings or we have watched the movie. At one point the Orcs who are the bad guys take two of the hobbits, who tend to be the clueless little people, and the Orcs intend to deliver the Hobbits to a sinister leader Saruman. Three of the hobbits friends, Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas take on the quest of relentlessly pursuing the hobbits to save them from their awful fate. The movie shows them running to the point of exhaustion and facing all kinds of obstacles. But they will not quit. They won't relent. They won't be side tracked until they are certain that their friends are safe. That is a good example of our word for patience in our text.

This patient endurance is a necessary quality in a Christian's life. It is an active word.

We see it one of Paul's prayers.

Colossians 1:9 (NKJV)

9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;.....

11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;

We see in Colossians that Paul is praying for these believers. He is asking that they be filled with the proper kind of knowledge. He prays this so they can walk worthy of their calling. It is an active walk. It is progress. It is moving forward. And his prayer includes that they would be strengthened with all might. Why? Why do they need this supernatural empowerment? Because they are sitting around, ticking off days until Christ's return? No. It is because they will need it in the course of their lives as they trek in heaven's direction. Endurance or patience is coupled with long suffering. It is coupled up with bearing up under a load. Brad often uses the word "steadfast". That is what we are talking about. Now let's look at the other word in this part of the text in verse 4.

Comfort- a greek word with the same root as paraklete- the comforter- a description and title of the Holy Spirit,

It means a calling near, exhortation, admonition, encouragement, consolation, comfort, solace. It is a coming alongside kind of word.

This comfort is often delivered, not so much by the **conveyance of a feeling** but the **delivery of a truth**. We all need to know that we are cared about. That is important. Along with that we need **mental** fuel. We need something to hang on to mentally. We need to think rightly. We need an anchor to hold us fast in our turbulent seas.

Think of a turbulent time in your life. What truth was it that helped you get through it? Sometimes they are very specific truths. Sometimes they are more general. But brothers and sisters along with the Holy Spirit provide an invaluable service when they enter into our suffering with us and bring us that truth that will help us to endure.

I think of the time I probably mentioned before when I was in college and I bought some bad, unneeded insurance by unknowingly signing a loan for it. I was swindled and I should have known better. I talked to a seasoned insurance professional later. I told him of my embarrassment and shame. I was kicking myself. And he brought a truth to me that I have never forgotten. It has changed my perspective all through my life about making mistakes. He asked me how much this mistake cost me. It was about \$200. He asked if I would ever make that mistake again. I said- never. He then told me that he didn't think that \$200 was really too much to pay for an education that valuable. His words stuck with me to this day. You pay for an education.

And while my suffering in this example was very minor, that truth brought to me from another believer provided long lasting comfort. And I have been able to convey that truth about life to a lot of people over the course of my life.

Let's look at a text that shows us a lot about this word.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (NKJV)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

4 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.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

6 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.

7 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.

Evidently comfort is a pretty big deal. It is used 6 times in this passage.

Sometimes God comforts us. Sometimes we comfort others with the comfort we have received. And notice the context. We also have endurance and steadfastness in this text. That is no coincidence. Paul is talking about life the way life is **really lived**. These concepts can't be **segregated** in real life. We can separate them to study them but we put them together when we live our lives. Reading our text I began to think about my life. I think about the times that I cried out for comfort in my distress. You know, I cannot remember a time when a feeling of comfort suddenly and mysteriously came over me. Maybe it happens some times, but it has never happened to me as far as I can remember. When I have prayed for comfort God has always used **people** and **truth**, and often **people bringing truth**, to comfort me. I can recall one night in particular long ago when I cried out to God for help. I was in desperation and I was alone. I wanted God to take away my pain. He didn't. But he sent me people to help me through the pain. He sent me people to teach me to think about my situation. It was surprising to find out how many people had suffered the same thing I had. And God sent truth through a lot of sources to teach me what I needed to know. I think that is how God usually acts. That is why the church is so important. **We are the vehicles of God's comfort**. If God is going to comfort someone, he will often use our hands and feet and mouths to do it. It is not that he couldn't do it directly. Surely the maker of the brain would know which spot to press that would shut down the despair. But he does not normally do that. Because that process would not accomplish what can be accomplished by us faithfully enduring

difficult circumstances. Do you realize that if God comforted us by removing our pain, we would have no ministry to bring to someone else who was suffering? Mike used to say that the best teachers were those for whom the learning came with difficulty. A person who has to steadily think his way through a problem can usually tell someone else how to do the same.

Suffering produces that in us when we faithfully persevere.

Now let's go back to our text. We know what comfort is. We know what perseverance or patience is.

we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Now look at this closely. Where does the comfort come from? Where does the paraklete ministry of comfort come from? The scriptures. I believe this serves to emphasize what I was saying earlier. **Renewed thinking results in renewed living and renewed feeling.** And the lion's share of what God is doing in our lives is changing our thinking. Even **comfort** is a result of **changed thinking**. Think about it. When we are comforted, what changes? Is our circumstance changed? No. That would be called a rescue. Sometimes we **need** a rescue. But **more often** we need comfort. We need to see some light at the end of the tunnel of our present difficulty. We need a way to see our lives in such a way that what we go through is a small price to pay for what we will end up with. We need to think in such a way that the suffering **does not go away**, but the suffering is **worth it**. Or maybe, that us bearing up under the suffering is worth it. We are encouraged to not give up. We are encouraged to not be so "now" focused that we lose the perspective required to get through this hard time.

And often we need to know that we are not in this alone. Scripture tells us that. And fortunately other believers can convey that by their mere presence.

I think in our text, this comfort we are discussing is really comfort with a view to perseverance that will result in hope.

Suppose we were to face a situation like Job's. Suppose we were to lose all our children on one day. What an awful thing. At that point, no pat answer is going to help us. We are going to need serious comfort. We are going to need a truth like rope holding us on the edge of a cliff. We will need some idea that we can cling to that will help us.

And that truth will come from scripture, one way or another. It will be a truth that gives us a reason to hang on. It will put our suffering in a perspective that is bearable. It won't be pretty. But it will be effective.

That comfort, that idea, that truth, will help us to endure, to persevere, to be **patient** in the midst of our suffering. And as we cling for our sanity and our lives,

we are pointed steadily to a certain fixed point in the future. We are weaned of our love for things as they are. We become less fixated on what this world has to offer us. At this point we just want an **eternal** city. We want an existence free from the consequences of sin. We want to live where we or our loved ones will never suffer again. We gain a perspective in this life that those who have never suffered cannot understand.

So the comfort allows us to endure and as we endure we become fixated on our future hope.

Look at this.

Romans 5:1-5 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Look how in verse 2 we rejoice in hope of God's glory.

Then it circles back around to our lives. We face hard times. That produces the ability to keep on keeping on, which makes us into people who have qualities we would not have had otherwise and that circles back around to hope.

This is similar thinking to our text this morning. Faithful living through **whatever this life has in store for us** points us toward hope. It **fixes** in us hope. It **leads** to hope. We begin looking forward. And what about that hope? Is it a pipedream? Is it just an opiate like the communist leader had said?

No. Why? **Hope does not disappoint.** When we look forward by faith to that which God has promised, we will never be disappointed. It is like a solid investment. We know it will give back to us what we expect.

So scripture gives the comfort that enables the endurance that furthers our hope. So where do the endurance and comfort come from? Scripture.

OK, then let's look at verse 5 in our text.

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded

Here we see reference to a **God** that is the **source** of patience and comfort. So does God grant patience and comfort or does scripture produce patience and comfort? The answer is YES.

God is the source of our salvation. God is the source of every grace. And we see that **scripture is the vehicle** he uses much of the time to convey those things to us. Often the things **that God does** and the effect that **scripture has** in our lives are duplicated. That is also true of the Holy Spirit's work. Why? Well the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Christ IS the truth. And the scripture is truth conveyed to us by God. There is really no big mystery here. Scripture is truth revealed to us in such a way that we can understand it and incorporate it in our lives. It is truth about God and truth about us and our world. And it flies in the face of what our world chooses to believe. God is replacing lies in us with His truth through the ministry of the Holy Spirit using the media of His Word.

I think we can find encouragement here. While what **we decide** is important, the end product is not completely dependent upon our effort. God is at work in us to will and to do according to his purpose. The phrase, **God's not finished with me yet**, is a very biblically accurate statement. We can take encouragement in knowing that we are His children. We are not powerful enough to mess up His plan. He will not hesitate to discipline us. If we will not comply at first, He will not give up on us. He will carry his plan out. We might find ourselves with some miserable trips out to the woodshed, but he will not leave his children alone to their own devices. We make it easier upon ourselves and others if we willingly submit quickly, but God is a good Father. He is never guilty of neglect of His children. He will see that every one of them gets to where they need to get. Now back to our text.

5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is praying for the Romans. This then is a prayer that we can pray for each other with authority. This is an "In Jesus's name" prayer. This is in His will. And we can count on God to answer it. We can pray this in faith, expectantly.

May God grant you to be like minded toward one another.

I think at this point Mr. Barnhouse sums up much of what we have been saying about this text.

This like-mindedness must exist among brethren who are designated as strong and weak. The weak are not to criticize the strong for their liberties in Christ and

the strong are not to expel the weak from the church. Rather the two groups are to live in oneness for mutual good and edification. Believers are not to think in terms of being “a good Presbyterian” “a good Baptist” “a good Lutheran” “a good Methodist” “a good catholic” “a good Anglican” or any other such category, but only in terms of being a good and faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and because of Him, good and faithful servants one of another. This is what the Word of God means when it tells us to be “like-minded”. It does not mean that all believers must agree on the manner and mode of baptism, or on the manner and mode of ordination, or on the details of events connected with the second coming of Christ. It DOES mean that we are to agree on who Christ is, what He came to do, on the fact that He accomplished what He purposed to do, and that he is on the throne of the Father today in order to be Lord of the Church. If we can be in accord on these things, true harmony should then flow from our yielded-ness to the Lord Jesus Christ, who certainly is seeking to draw all believers to Himself.

Mr Barnhouse goes on to say, and I really like this quote, “Our text is not concerned with “the **mind** of Christ” in relation to doctrine but with the **attitude** of Christ in relation to others.

I think he captured the meaning of this passage very well.

Think about it. Paul just spent all this time telling us how love is supposed to cover the difference in our opinions. He could not possibly be summing it up by telling us we should have no difference of opinions. The same mind must mean the same attitude, the same mindset, the same outlook toward one another.

So Paul’s prayer is that we will come together in the same mindset toward each other. And what will that mindset comply to? It goes on to say, **according to Christ Jesus,**

It isn’t hard to understand what Paul is saying. We are to have the mindset **toward one another** that our big brother Jesus **has toward us**. We have already spent a good bit of time on this. It is obvious that there was nothing self serving in Christ’s actions or attitude. He loved us. And we are to come together in fellowship under His umbrella and represent Him in all that we do. We are to come together with the greatest thing we have in common being Christ. That is what we must be in complete agreement with doctrinally and relationally.

6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, there are a lot of churches where the leadership thinks they are right about every point of doctrine. In fact, they think they are so right that it would

dishonor God to accept anyone with a different opinion than their own. And it is sad, because they believe that nonsense. They think they are honoring God by adhering to every tiny point of doctrine that they have agreed upon. They are usually very exclusive, looking down their noses at those who are more inclusive. Because in their minds, giving in at these points is being liberal. It is not representing Christ well.

What is so sad is that these people can never do what Paul is telling the Romans to do. These people have already disallowed anyone who is different to join their club. They have eliminated the need for love by demanding sameness in all their members. So they cannot come together under Christ, putting all their freedoms and differences into the proper realm, and calling out to God as simply a body of Christ. Calling out to God with one mindset, one overriding priority, one unifying purpose,.... Crying out with one mouth, all saying the same thing in different ways.

And what are they saying? To God be the glory. To God be the glory for bringing **all of us sinners** to the foot of the cross. For making **all of us sinners** into a family by what big brother Jesus did for us. For making the disputable differences of such little importance that they aren't worthy of much focus.

You see, groups that demand sameness cannot exhibit the love that Paul tells the church in Rome to exhibit. They can't. There is no target for it. There is no one to carry it out on. It is sad. Love is intended to cover those difference, not a demand for compliance on scriptures that are easily understood in more than one way. The thing we must be of the same mind about is the place of Christ and the place of the church. Christ will work out all the rest as we love each other.

You see, at the end of the day it is all about the **glory of God**. It is all about displaying the **love He has for us** by our **love for one another**. And it isn't even primarily about us loving one another. It is primarily about us loving Christ which gives glory to God.

You see, just like we have said many times in Romans, the church of Christ is all about the glory of God. When we lose that perspective, when we start looking at it being all about what I want in a church and what I need from a church, we have lost the perspective for why we exist and what we are here for.

We are ultimately a fellowship of sinners saved by grace for the glory of God. And in eternity all of the praise will be flowing where it deserves. It will go to the Father and to the Son. And every insignificant difference we disagreed about will be seen in the light of eternity as being not worthy of a second of discord. And every price we paid for the weakness of a brother or sister will seem like a tiny

price to pay. And every obedience will be remembered fondly as the proper use of time during that period of time that passed like the life of a wildflower.

At the end of the day, the church is all about the glory of God.

Is that how we see it? Is that how we live it? Are we focused on the right thing?