

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

[www.sermonaudio.com/crc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/crc)

[www.unholycharade.com](http://www.unholycharade.com)

[www.lightfordarktimes.com](http://www.lightfordarktimes.com)

## *God's Word to a Hesitating Church*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

*“Getting to Know the Father of  
All Mercies and Comfort”*

**May 25, 2014**

**Sermon Text:** 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

**Scripture Reading:** Isaiah 53

### **Introduction-**

This account is taken from Tom Nettles' recent book on the life and theology of Charles Spurgeon, describing the state of affairs in London in regard to the evangelical churches there:

When Spurgeon arrived, the pulpiteers of London were mighty men of renown. That a nineteen-year-old, in less than half a decade, would rise to be the most prominent of all would have been unthinkable. An astute, but cynical, observer of The London Pulpit, who wrote a book by that name, mused: “I know not that there is a happier berth in the world than that of a fashionable Evangelical preacher in this enlightened city and enlightened age.” The evangelical preacher was adored by the women, envied by the men, had his portrait in neighborhood shops, and received gifts of worsted wool slippers from the young women. His silver teapot was a gift of the congregation.

Nettles, Tom (2013-08-22). Living by Revealed Truth (Kindle Locations 1966-1971). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians (and to all the believers in the region of Achaia) is, as we saw last time, a vital

instruction for all of us, and no church leader can afford to be ignorant of its teaching. Here is true Christian ministry. Paul tells us what his experience was as a preacher of the gospel, and we can expect no less if we are truly standing for Christ. Today, as in the time of the apostles, Christians so often embrace this “triumphalism” and even measure the validity and success of a ministry or minister by it. The church should grow numerically. We must see people professing Christ and being baptized every week. Ministers should be popular, great orators, real “men about town” loved and praised by everyone. Christians will not suffer, but will be exalted. Such are the notions of triumphalism. By its foolish standards, the Corinthians were rejecting Paul and thus were in danger of rejecting Christ.

Think carefully. Is not the “Christian” climate in which we live today filled with celebrity pastors and personalities? Oh, perhaps the world is not so impressed, but professing Christians by the droves seem to be. And if we would just focus more locally, who would be the most “successful” and “triumphant” pastors and churches in this town of ours? By what standards and measures would they be deemed to be so? What does a true minister of Christ look like? What does a true Christian look like? *What does Christ look like?* If Paul sent a

resume to a local church looking for a pastor, would such a church hire him? Listen now as Paul begins to sort this business out for the Corinthians, calling on them to get to know who God is – the Father of mercies and comfort who comforts His people in their *afflictions*.

2 Corinthians 1:1-11 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: (2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(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 affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (5) For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (6) If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. (7) Our hope for you is unshaken, **for we know that as you share in**

**our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.** (8) For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. (9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. **But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.**

(10) He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. (11) You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

This is the church. This is the minister of Christ, and these are the people of God. In reality. This is how it is. There is a kind of “triumphalism” that is biblical:

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." (37) No, in all these things we are more than

conquerors through him who loved us. (38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nevertheless, affliction and suffering are the experience of Christ's people in this fallen and perishing world. The word “comfort” and its forms occurs some 10 or 11 times in these few verses! And why is this comfort needed? Because “suffering” and “affliction” are mentioned just about as many times in these same verses! Jesus told us-

John 15:17-21 These things I command you, so that you will love one another. (18) "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (20) Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. (21) But all these things they will do to you on account of

my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

What was the experience of our Lord Himself in this world? Suffering. Are we greater than He? An outside observer of the church today might think that we believe so!! We need the correction Paul is giving to the Corinthians as much as they did.

### **Paul as a True Worshipper**

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul has identified himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” Writing this sometime in the early 50’s AD, he wants to remind the Corinthians, and the false teachers who had crept in among them, that he was appointed to his office by Christ. It is by the will of God that he is an apostle. He will continue to defend his calling throughout the letter:

2 Corinthians 12:11-12 I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. (12) The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

These Corinthians needed to learn what following Christ means, and what we will experience when we walk in His footsteps.

Paul opens verse 3 with a doxology, praising and blessing God. He is able to do so from the heart because He has experienced *the comfort of God* in his sufferings. God (note that for the correction of his Jewish enemies at Corinth he reminds the Corinthians that the God of their own Scriptures is the Father of Jesus Christ!)...God is the great Comforter. He is the merciful Father. One who has experienced this comfort, this “coming of the paraklete” can bless Him as such. There is no substitute here. I cannot know the comfort of God for you, nor you for me. Each of us must be afflicted and suffer for Christ, as a result of following Him, before we experience God as Comforter. Many people bail out at this point:

Matthew 13:18-21 "Hear then the parable of the sower: (19) When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. (20) As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself,

but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

## The Body of Christ

Notice now the unity and fellowship of believers that is taught in these verses:

- Vs 4. Paul is comforted so that he can comfort other believers
- Vs 5 – we all *share* in the same sufferings and comfort
- Vs 6 – Paul and the Corinthians endure the same sufferings (Christ’s sufferings)
- Vs 7 – believers share the same experience of suffering and comfort
- Vs 11 – believers are praying for one another and God’s comfort (blessing) comes to us as a result

Paul Barnett writes:

“References to sufferings, too, are prominent in this opening benediction. Is this because the Corinthians are urgently questioning why the apostle Paul sustains such a degree of pain and difficulty in the course of his ministry? Do Paul’s references to the Corinthians’ sufferings (‘the *same* suffering we suffer’ – vs 6) suggest that these too were an issue for them? Paul’s immediate introduction of theme of suffering may be to put

sufferings – his and theirs – into divine perspective....Just as the One whom God sent suffered in and for a world alienated from God, so too, the apostle of the Sent One and the community of the Sent One experience the pain of rejection in that same world as they bear witness to Christ.” [The New International Commentary on the New Testament].

We are one in Christ. We are joined to Him, indwelt and led by His Spirit. Therefore, *real Christians will necessarily have the same experience of suffering and receiving God’s comfort.* This suffering is not generic, but is specifically *the sufferings of Christ.* Suffering as a result of being in Christ. Hated by the world. How do you find a true church? Here is certainly one mark to look for – *how does such a church stand with the world?*

This is vital for us to understand, for a number of reasons, but primarily because seeing clearly in regard to experiencing the sufferings of Christ will prevent us from being confused when such persecution comes. Let’s think this through-

A number of years ago a fellow I knew – he lived in another town – and who was a professing Christian, active in his church, told me “You know Jeff, you guys just seem to have a lot of

trouble in your church. I don't understand that. We don't have those kinds of things in our church."

Now he said this in a critical mode. What he meant was, *you must be doing something wrong because these things should not be happening so much. Why is it that your church has these conflicts and ours doesn't?* At the time that planted some doubts in my mind – maybe I was the problem, you see.

But let me tell you what the facts have turned out to be. This is one of the advantages of the passing of time. That happened probably 15 years ago. This guy is not finishing well. His children have not done well in respect to following Christ. The last time we saw him, he was really a different person – and not in a good way. It was as if we didn't even know him anymore. Oh, and his church? Turns out there was all kinds of rampant sin in it.

The elders and myself can also testify to you that this "triumphalism" has also been used against us – and really against all of you – in the last few years when we were dealing with divisive people who were trying to destroy the ministry here:

- You alienate people. It's your fault.

- You should not have friends in the church because you always mistreat them and reject them.
- There is something wrong with you and with this church because you aren't at peace with people. You don't get along with people.

See it? This is the kind of thing that can throw us and confuse us if we don't get a firm hold on what Paul (and many other parts of Scripture) are saying. What are the *sufferings of Christ*? Illness? General hardships? No. Specifically what Paul means by this term is, *being hated by the world because of Christ*. I had friends when I was a police officer. Friends that weren't Christians. Longstanding friends. Friends in my family – cousins and aunts and uncles. When I became a pastor – that's when the trouble started! And now I know why.

It is vital that YOU know why as well, because –

- If you are truly in Christ, you are going to experience the very same sufferings (and comfort!),
- If you think it strange that a minister or elder or church member suffers these things, then you are a prime target for the tactics of the enemy, as these Corinthians were. You will be alienated from your church, from

your shepherds, and really from the truth of the gospel.

I say again – this has been one of the central tactics of the enemy used against us in this church for years. Paul was *always* in trouble! Paul was always *causing* trouble! Paul did not “just get along” with everyone, and neither will you if you really belong to Christ and follow Him. And what we can expect to happen is the same old line of attack – *if this minister or elder or church member really was a Christian, they would not be in all of this trouble. They would be well thought of by people.*

### **Comfort and the Messianic Age**

There is another very important theme going on here in respect to Paul’s emphasis upon the comfort of God. He is identifying himself and his ministry with the New Covenant era promised by the Old Testament scriptures which his Jewish opponents were quite familiar with. Listen to this entire chapter as it announces/foretells the coming of the Messiah who would bring *comfort* to His people in their affliction and need:

Isaiah 40:1-31 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. (2) Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that

she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. (3) A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (4) Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. (5) And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (6) A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. (7) The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. (8) The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. (9) Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" (10) Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. (11) He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (12) Who has

measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? (13) Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? (14) Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? (15) Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. (16) Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. (17) All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. (18) To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? (19) An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. (20) He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move. (21) Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations

of the earth? (22) It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; (23) who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. (24) Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. (25) To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. (26) Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. (27) Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? (28) Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. (29) He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. (30) Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; (31) but they who wait

for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

See it? A divine ministration of *comfort* is a mark of the New Era! The Jews had this in their own Scriptures and thus Paul's argument here about this divine "comfort" in his own experience. And it is vitally bound up in the coming of the Holy Spirit:

John 14:16-20 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, (17) even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (18) "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (19) Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. (20) In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Later in chapter 3 Paul will demonstrate that he is a minister of the NEW covenant-

2 Corinthians 3:3-6 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with

ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (4) Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. (5) Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, (6) who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

### What is this "Comfort"?

Isaiah 41:10-14 fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (11) Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. (12) You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all. (13) For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you." (14) Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

In the “already but not yet” nature of God’s kingdom that we are in, we still find ourselves the targets of the enemy. We suffer. We experience affliction because of Christ. But the comfort – *which is the “I am with you” presence of the Lord* – is a foretaste of that ultimate comfort and presence in the New creation to come. The time when all enemies will be put to shame. When our warfare is ended. Already, but not yet. We have a taste – the Holy Spirit is in us and thus Christ is in us – but the full meal is yet to come. This is Barnett again:

“Throughout this letter Paul is enjoining the Corinthians, by their attitudes and actions, to align themselves with God’s eschatological action in history in this ‘day of salvation’ in which He has established a new covenant. While salvation flows from the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostle is the bearer of the gospel of that salvation to the world. Paul is afflicted ‘for their...salvation’ in the sense that his calling as an apostle is wrought with suffering... and also because they have received the gospel in the context of his sufferings. *What they tend to despise in him is part and parcel of what brought life to them!*” [NICNT, p 77].

One of the very best prayers you can pray is – *“Lord, please give me your comfort and encouragement today.”*

As you experience affliction, so also the Christian will experience the Lord’s comfort, and grow in the intimate knowledge of Christ. In addition, this comfort we experience is not designed to end with us! It’s a “pass it on” affair so that we are then able to comfort one another when a brother or sister is suffering, with the same comfort we experienced. This divine comfort comes to us then:

1. Directly by the Holy Spirit in us,
2. Through the Spirit-led ministry of other believers to us.

Consider how Paul ends this section, and the things he learned as a result of this suffering/comfort dynamic:

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. (9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (10) He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. (11) You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the

blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

We do not know what specific trial Paul is referring to here. But it was intense. So much so that it appeared there was no escape. This was it – he was going to die. This one was beyond his strength and he resolved that he had been “sentenced to death.”

But what happened? What did he learn? Not from his ultimate escape from death, but before that. In the suffering and human hopelessness before? *The comfort of God*. In what form? The assurance that *God raises the dead*. [Could he be referring to when he was stoned in Lystra? Acts 14].

Paul was comforted and his hope was sustained and strengthened. Here is the lesson he knows that the Lord was teaching him in all this-

*“...to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.”*

There it is. In weakness, there is strength. That is God’s kingdom. That is what the Corinthians needed to learn in place of their triumphalistic notions.

And it is what we need to learn as well.