

FBC POWELL, 7-29-18 AM NOTES
“The God of All Comfort”
2 Corinthians 1:1-11
1 in Series, “Be Encouraged”

2 Corinthians 1:8 (HCSB) “For we don’t want you to be unaware, brothers, of our affliction that took place in Asia: we were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that we even despaired of life.”

Introduction (vv. 1-2)

2 Corinthians 7:8-9 (NASB) ⁸“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—⁹ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of repentance*; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of God*, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.”

I. A Word of Comfort (vv. 3-7)

A. The Source of Our Comfort (v. 3)

paraclete—the One who comes along side us to give aid, to empower us to do the will of God.

First, you can focus on your situation.

Second, you can focus on others.

2 Corinthians 10:12 (NASB) “For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.”

Third, we can focus on God Himself!

*My Father's way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache,
But in my soul I'm glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.
My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away,
But still I'll trust my Lord to lead
For He doth know the way.
Though night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break;
I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.
There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;
But come what may, I'll simply trust
And leave it all to Him.
For by and by the mist will lift
And plain it all He'll make,
Through all the way, though dark to me,
He made not one mistake.*

—A. M. Overton

"God does not pat us on the head and give us a piece of candy or a toy to distract our attention from our troubles. No, He puts strength into our hearts so we can face our trials and triumph over them." —Warren Weirsbe

John 8:44b (NASB) "...for he is a liar and the father of lies."

B. The Spread of Our Comfort (vv. 4-7)

2 Corinthians 1:6 (HCSB) "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is experienced in [your] endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer."

2 Corinthians 1:7 (NIV) "And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."

II. A Word of Deliverance (vv. 8-11)

A. Deliverance From Despair (v. 8)

2 Corinthians 1:8b (NIV) "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life."

"The Lord had to allow Paul to despair of life itself so that he could rely on the One who brings life out of death."

—Ray Steadman

B. Deliverance From Death (vv. 9-10)

"...God has one great purpose for His people above everything else; it is to destroy in us forever any confidence in the flesh; it is to bring us to the place where self-confidence has passed into history and has been exchanged for a confidence in God who raises the dead."

—Alan Redpath

C. Deliverance Through Prayer (v. 11)

Sermon 1: The God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

I have looked forward with anticipation to this day when we begin our study in 2 Corinthians entitled "Be Encouraged". This book of 2 Corinthians is unique in that it gives us an unprecedented inside look at the Apostle Paul. We will learn about some of his struggles as he opens the doors of his soul. We will see that he was a special man, but a man and not a superman.

This letter is addressed to the church at Corinth. Corinth was a very prosperous city in Paul's day, but it was also an extremely immoral city – perhaps the most immoral city anywhere in the first century. For instance, to “corinthianize” became a euphemism for committing sexual immorality. A “Corinthian girl” was a slang term for a prostitute. It is no wonder that church had so many problems. Someone described this church as “an island in a cesspool”. Morals were almost non-existent. I think you can see why a study of this book is relevant to us in this day.

Whereas 1 Corinthians is perhaps the harshest book Paul wrote, 2 Corinthians is one of the most encouraging books he wrote. One of the key words in 2 Corinthians is a word that is translated “comfort” or “encouragement”. This word is used eighteen times in this book. I don't know about you, but I often need comfort and encouragement. In this sin-soaked world that we live in, we cannot escape the heaviness, the temptation to be discouraged. This discouragement is something that all believers have to deal with. See if you can relate to these words: “I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to.” That sentence came from a man who has been called the greatest preacher since the Apostle Paul – Charles Spurgeon of London (1834-1892).

Discouragement is no respecter of persons. The apostle Paul, as we will see in this study, struggled with discouragement. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:8 (HCSB): “For we don't want you to be unaware, brothers, of our affliction that took place in Asia: we were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that we even despaired of life.”

Introduction (vv. 1-2)

Let's focus in on the background of the church at Corinth. This church was planted by the Apostle Paul and he ministered there for about a year and a half (Acts 18:1-18). In 1 and 2 Corinthians combined, we have twenty-nine chapters. Considering the “missing” letter that we don't have, it seems that Paul wrote more to the Corinthian church than any other church. When we piece the Scriptures together, we see how involved Paul was with this church that he planted. After leaving Corinth and the new church he had planted there, some serious problems arose in the church. Paul sent Timothy to deal with them (1 Corinthians 4:17), and then he wrote what we know as 1 Corinthians. Sadly, these problems were not resolved, and Paul made what he called a “painful visit” to Corinth to confront the troublemakers (2 Corinthians 2:1). The problems continued, and Paul wrote a letter he described in 2 Corinthians 7:8-9:

For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—⁹ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of repentance*; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of God*, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

It seems that the members of the church at Corinth finally listened and changed, and that is when Paul wrote to them what we call “2 Corinthians” to encourage them.

Paul begins this letter that we call 2 Corinthians by affirming his apostleship. This is important, because his apostleship is the link he has to God's authority. He presents his apostleship as something that God chose for him, not something that he sought for and earned. “Grace” and “peace” was a traditional greeting among Christians. True grace and genuine biblical peace have their origin in God alone.

I. A Word of Comfort (vv. 3-7)

Did you catch the fact that some form of the word “comfort” is used ten times in those five verses? We also see the word “affliction”, or some form of “suffering” is used seven times. On this side of Heaven, Christians can expect much affliction, and much suffering, but we can also expect God’s comfort. In spite of what the heretical “Health, Wealth, and Prosperity” preachers teach, afflictions and suffering are very real, and every Christian will experience them. As we will see throughout this book, affliction is one of God’s most effective tools in the shaping of our lives.

A. The Source of Our Comfort (v. 3)

What does the word translated “comfort” mean? It is the Greek word *paraklesis*. It literally means to come to one’s side to give aid. It is actually a form of this word that is used to describe God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the *paraclete* – the One who comes along side us to give aid, to empower us to do the will of God. God has a monopoly on true, genuine comfort. He often uses other believers as the deliverer of that comfort, but true comfort comes only from God Himself. When you are going through suffering, affliction, disappointment, hurt, or weakness in any area of life, you can focus on one of three things.

First, you can focus on your situation. You can magnify and become consumed with your situation – sickness, a divorce you didn’t choose or initiate, a prodigal child, unjustly losing your job, false accusations, or any number of things we might classify as affliction or suffering. There is no comfort in focusing on your painful situation!

Second, you can focus on others. It may be comparing yourself with others, blaming others for your trial, feeling that others haven’t shown enough concern for you and your situation. I would like to warn you with what we read in 2 Corinthians 10:12: “For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.” Don’t skip quickly over that! God’s unique plan for your life requires some things that His plans for another do not require.

Third, we can focus on God Himself!

Does it seem to you that sometimes (especially in a time of trial, a time of pain) that God isn’t fair? If by “fair” we mean that God should treat His children alike and appoint the same amount and type of trials to everyone, then I will tell you that God is not fair! Fairness in the sense of treating everyone alike, is not one of God’s attributes. He has blessed me with such good health, while others who are above me in godliness suffer with bad health and constant pain. God is not fair by the world’s definition of fair. God is just, but God isn’t fair (by man’s assessment). When I speak of focusing on God, I am referring to a focus on His love, His wisdom, His mercy, His amazing Grace, His perfection, His omnipotence, His goodness, and His omniscience.

Because God is omniscient (all knowing), He knows exactly what you need to accomplish His perfect plan for you. Because God is omnipotent, He can bring about everything in our life that we need to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. A. M. Overton wrote these comforting words:

*My Father's way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache,
But in my soul I'm glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.*

*My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away,
But still I'll trust my Lord to lead
For He doth know the way.*

*Though night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break;
I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.*

*There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;
But come what may, I'll simply trust
And leave it all to Him.*

*For by and by the mist will lift
And plain it all He'll make,
Through all the way, though dark to me,
He made not one mistake.*

That is so true, so great a summary of what the Scriptures teach about suffering and God's unique plan for each of His children!

Learn this – All true comfort is rooted in God! Let me give you a caution. Don't think of God's comfort in terms of sympathy. Sympathy can actually weaken us rather than strengthen us. Warren Weirsbe has a good word here: "God does not pat us on the head and give us a piece of candy or a toy to distract our attention from our troubles. No, He puts strength into our hearts so we can face our trials and triumph over them." [Warren Weirsbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary – Volume One*, page 629]

The phrase "Father of" speaks of "the originator of". For instance, we read what John 8:44b says of Satan, "... for he is a liar and the father of lies." In other words, lies originated with Satan. God is the origin of all true mercies and comfort. You can't find true "mercies and comfort" anywhere but in God Himself. Mercy and comfort go together. Mercy has to do with God's understanding, His knowing our pain. His mercy and comfort often are seen together. Because God is merciful, He knows our pain and because He is the "God of all comfort". He comes alongside us in our pain to encourage us and give us perseverance to keep going. Oh, if we had time this morning, we could listen to testimony after testimony of the encouragement He gives in trials, in pain, and in disappointment.

B. The Spread of Our Comfort (vv. 4-7)

Let's focus on how the Lord responds to our affliction. As we saw in the last point, He comforts us in our affliction. Let's make sure that we know what the Bible means by "affliction". The Greek word literally means pressure. It would include physical pressure, financial pressure, emotional pressure, or relational pressure. This word also includes the idea of being crushed.

Have you ever heard someone say, “This thing is weighing heavy on my heart”? The Lord never promised that we would be free from crushing, or from heaviness. Here is what He does promise: we can experience God’s comfort in the midst of it! Along with our affliction comes God’s comfort.

Notice what we are to do with this God given gift of comfort. We don’t just hoard it up; we become a conduit to others that are hurting. Look at these words in verse 4b “to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” We are not to become “comfort hoarders”. We are to pour it out on others. Over the years I have watched this happen in the body of Christ. Someone gets the horrible news and I am called and see someone’s agony, someone being crushed, and then others come and begin to comfort them, pray for them, and cry with them – I think, “This is the body of Christ at work.” We are not to hoard God’s comfort.

All that those who do not know our Lord are left with nothing of substance – “be strong”, “hang in there”, “You’ll make it”, “keep looking up”. Oh, how sad to go through trials without the comfort of God and the comfort of those who know God and His comfort and share it with you! Make no mistake, the world watches those who know God. Your new car, nice home and well put together wardrobe doesn’t impress them. When they see the pressure, the trials, the heart break, the affliction, and they see the comfort of God, the confidence and trust in God, and they long for that.

The Apostle Paul goes so far as to say in verse 6 that one of the reasons that our God allows affliction, pressure, pain, and grief in our life is so that others see us go through it and realize that it is real. Listen to the Christian Standard Bible’s translation of 2 Corinthians 1:6 (HCSB): “If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is experienced in [your] endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer.” We can’t narrow this down to a cancer diagnosis, a death or an accident. How about a divorce that is unwanted and unexpected? How about a prodigal child? This truth in our text covers the messy, sin caused agony as well as the accidental death. This truth applies to the child who has adopted a sinful lifestyle or has been arrested. I remember when Kathy and I had only been married about two years. We were living in Nashville and were members of FBC Donelson. Kathy’s Sunday School teacher of young married women (Irene) was such a godly woman. But one Saturday Kathy got a phone call that Irene’s college age son had been arrested on drug charges – serious charges. As immature believers, we wondered how Irene would handle this. Probably she wouldn’t even be at church – after all this drug bust was one of the lead stories in the news programs. She was there! She taught her class like always. She was giving glory to God. That had a lasting impact on Kathy, on me, and that whole class of young women. This is the kind of stuff that verses 5-7 are talking about.

One of the things happening soon is several classes are going to be offered that facilitate the things spoken of in this passage (Divorce Care, Grief Care) – hopefully as God provides leaders, addiction care for families, parents of prodigals, and on and on. But don’t wait for a program. Seek out someone who has been through it and just ask them to meet with you and pray. 2 Corinthians 1:7 (NIV): “And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.”

I have prayed for and God has given me a pastor’s heart. I wish I could keep people from afflictions and trials, but affliction is one of God’s chosen tools to draw us to Him and mature us and make us more like Christ. God’s people need to experience troubles and trials. It is from

these trials that we experience His comfort and begin to share his heart. We see a word of comfort.

II. A Word of Deliverance (vv. 8-11)

Make no mistake; God is in control of our trials – individually and corporately. Those who respond well in the trials see the amazing deliverance.

A. Deliverance from Despair (v. 8)

We are not told what the specifics were that Paul had been through. It may have been the beatings which he suffered many times. It may have been imprisonment. It may have been both. Paul's Christian life was filled with suffering. Paul was no super-human who dealt with everything with a smile. He struggled. He was burdened beyond any human strength. 2 Corinthians 1:8b (NIV): "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." Paul had sunk about as far as a person could sink. That last phrase – "we despaired even of life" is as far down as you can go. Ray Steadman has a good word here: "The lord had to allow Paul to despair of life itself so that he could rely on the One who brings life out of death." [Ray Steadman, *Standing for Truth in a World of Lies*, page 275] The Greek word translated "despaired" means no passage, no way out, no exit.

B. Deliverance from Death (vv. 9-10)

Paul discovered that deliverance through these trials is through God alone – not our maneuvers or schemes. I read one of the most encouraging things that I want to share with you. It is by Alan Redpath. "...God has one great purpose for His people above everything else; it is to destroy in us forever any confidence in the flesh; it is to bring us to the place where self-confidence has passed into history and has been exchanged for a confidence in God who raises the dead." [Source Unknown] Amen, Amen!

C. Deliverance Through Prayer (v. 11)

What an amazing verse on prayer! Adversity never leaves a person the same. Either you will become bitter or you will learn through the trials to lean in heavily to God through prayer. One of the types of prayer that we should major on is praise. Praise puts our focus on God and takes it off our circumstances. That is true when we are individually going through sufferings or afflictions, or whether we as a church are going through trials. Pray brothers and sisters! Pray "...for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many." Pray that no bitterness creeps in, no despair, no open doors for the enemy to enter and wreak havoc. Pray! Don't waste your afflictions.