

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

II COR. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

2 Grace *be* to you and peace from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

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

6 And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings

which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation.

7 And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation.

8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

NOTES

God's Comfort in Trouble

Lesson Text: II Corinthians 1:1-11

Related Scriptures: I Peter 4:12-19

TIME: probably A.D. 56

PLACE: from Macedonia

GOLDEN TEXT—“[God] comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (II Corinthians 1:4).

Lesson Exposition

COMFORT—II Cor. 1:1-7

Introductory words (II Cor. 1:1-2). Paul begins II Corinthians the same way he began I Corinthians. He identifies himself as the author and establishes from the outset his apostolic calling and authority.

It was Christ who called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles, and this calling was initiated suddenly as he traveled to Damascus.

The only difference from his personal salutation in his first letter is the mention of Timothy instead of Sosthenes.

The source of comfort (II Cor. 1:3-4). After greeting the Corinthians, Paul then directs his attention to the praise of God. He was thankful *for* the Corinthian church, but he was thankful *to* God.

Paul then turns toward what is going to be the major theme of this passage. He is going to discuss comfort in affliction. But before getting to that, he affirms that God is the source of all comfort. The world can give us things to make us temporarily numb to our problems, but only God can provide true comfort.

God comforts us in *all* of our afflictions, not just some of them. Nothing we go through is so bad that God can-

not comfort us. His comfort does not come after the affliction is over, but while we are going through it. If you are suffering or hurting right now, you can turn to your Father; in Him you will find mercy and comfort.

The need for comfort (II Cor. 1:5-6). Paul's assurance to those who suffer is that Jesus knows how to comfort us because He has suffered more than anyone. The peace that comes with knowing Christ gives us the solid assurance that if we share in His suffering, then we can also expect to share in His comfort.

Your suffering is also intended to help you bless others who are suffering. God may bring someone who is going through a real battle into your life someday, and you will be able to help him or her because you have been through something similar. It may seem like little consolation now, but God can use your suffering for His glory.

The hope in comfort (II Cor. 1:7). No one enjoys suffering, but it cannot shake the hope of a person who is sold out for God. The Spirit-filled believer knows that God is with him in the fire of tribulation. The danger is not in suffering, but in straying from Christ.

AFFLICTION—II Cor. 1:8-9

Paul's personal sufferings (II Cor. 1:8). While Paul does not go into specific details concerning the suffering he faced in Asia, he does say that it was so severe that he despaired of life itself. He literally thought he was going to die. The pressures or burdens he faced in Asia made him feel as though he was going to collapse under their weight.

Paul's fight for life (II Cor. 1:9). The suffering Paul endured felt like a death sentence to him. At times it may seem like there is no way out of our suffering and that the end result must be death. In those moments, do not despair of life. Jesus Christ, who has conquered death, has promised to give you abundant life, but you must persevere in faith.

Persecution and suffering come to all believers (cf. Acts 14:22; II Tim. 3:12). God allows these things to come to us in order to keep us close to Him. Truth be told, we often learn more from suffering and failure than we do from victory and success. It is in the fire of suffering that we see the power of God at work.

DELIVERANCE—II Cor. 1:10-11

Deliverance from death (II Cor. 1:10). In writing about his personal suffering, Paul does not try to act brave or pretend that he was not afraid. In fact, he was so afraid at one point when living in Corinth that Jesus Himself had to actually come to him to assure him that no harm was going to come to him (cf. Acts 18:9-10).

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is pushing through in spite of fear. Paul was courageous not because he was fearless, but because he was faithful.

Deliverance through prayer (II Cor. 1:11). God promises to comfort us in suffering and that He gives us strength to endure. The word translated "com-

fort" and "consolation" (the same word in Greek) appears ten times in verses 3-7. Your afflictions are serious, but so is God's commitment to comfort you.

The key to perseverance is not to try harder or to wrestle more with our issues, but rather to turn to God in prayer. There is no shortcut for this. It is vital that we all pray for one another, because suffering is universal. It comes to everyone in varying degrees. No one is immune to suffering.

Just as Paul prayed for the church, he needed the church to pray for him. Our spiritual leaders, such as pastors, elders, evangelists, teachers, and deacons, are all expected to pray for the people they preside over. The people likewise need to pray for their leaders.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Paul end up in the apostolic ministry?
2. Who replaced Sosthenes from I Corinthians as Paul's companion (II Cor. 1:1)?
3. What is the overall theme of this week's passage of Scripture?
4. Who does Paul say is the source of all comfort?
5. How many of our afflictions does God comfort us in?
6. What assurance do we have about sharing in Christ's sufferings?
7. How can your suffering help another person?
8. How severe were Paul's personal sufferings?
9. What is one reason why suffering comes to all believers?
10. What is the key to perseverance?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God sovereignly chooses each of His servants for a specific time and place to accomplish His purposes (II Cor. 1:1).
2. God gives His people the grace and peace they need to fulfill their purpose (vs. 2).
3. God's comfort toward us has multiplied benefit; it is used through us to help others (vss. 3-4).
4. Patience and endurance in trials are evidence of God's work in those who trust Him (vss. 5-7).
5. Our troubles can seem overwhelming, but Christ gives us grace to endure them all (vss. 8-9).
6. Christians help one another endure tough times through steadfast prayer (vss. 10-11).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does Paul use the word "saints" in his introduction?
2. Who is the Comforter (cf. John 14:16)? How has God comforted you in your troubles? Discuss.
3. How does God use affliction and trials to make His people more effective? Discuss.
4. Why is it so important to display Christ's mercy and compassion?
5. How did Paul personally experience the mercy and comfort of God in his life?
6. Why is intercessory prayer so essential?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

"[God] comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (II Corinthians 1:4).

Paul cherishes the idea of comfort, or consolation, in Christ. Later in this chapter, he records the tribulations he suffered in Asia. These troubles were so extreme that they made him despair "even of life" (II Cor. 1:8).

Paul knew that he was not alone in his distress. In describing the comfort that he experienced from God, Paul used a Greek word that carries the idea of encouragement and exhortation, to reach down and provide help and strength to someone in need. In fact, the second syllable of our English word "comfort" comes from the Latin *fortis*, meaning "strong."

Paul considered himself the spiritual father of the Corinthian believers. He was careful to note that all consolation comes from the "Father of mercies" (1:3), that is, God the Father. Paul especially praised God for comforting him through the ministry of Titus, a Gentile missionary who had served the church at Corinth. Titus reported that the Corinthians felt deep sorrow for their sins and longed to see Paul again (cf. II Cor. 7:13-16).

God's comfort is not merely for our personal satisfaction; God comforts us so that we may also comfort others in their tribulations. All of this is connected to Christ, who suffered for our sake, and who also reaches out to comfort and encourage us in our troubles.

—Mark Winter.