

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

The famed Evangelist, Billy Graham, once said, "One of the most comforting truths in all the Bible to me as I travel from one part of the world to another is to know that God has stationed His heavenly guards to protect, guide, and lead me through life's dangerous way. I cannot see these beings with my physical eyes, but I sense they are present every day."

Our God is a God of comfort, and He will walk with us every step during our times of trial, trouble, and difficulty. Paul opens his second letter to the Corinthians with vital truth for the believer. The term translated "comfort" is used in some form five times in verses 3-5. It literally means "a calling to one's aid." God comes to our aid in time of need.

Thus, as we begin our study of 2 Corinthians, let's follow the outline below:

- I. God is the Author of Our Fortitude (vv. 1-7)**
- II. God is the Aim of Our Faith (vv. 8-20)**
- III. God is the Agent of Our Freedom (vv. 21-24)**

I. God is the Author of Our Fortitude (vv. 1-7)

Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians concerning their church. Now he writes an intensely personal letter applicable especially to each believer individually (vv. 1-2). It is as if Paul knew the personal struggles they experienced. The Apostle peered deeply into their hearts, examining their daily lives and circumstances. That's the way God is. He never is far from His children. He knows the difficulties we face and the trauma we feel. Hence, we find the Apostle's words deeply comforting.

Paul writes, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 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" (vv. 3-4). Immediately, he asserts God is the author of our strength and fortitude. He is the "Father of mercies" as well as the "God of all comfort." This is specifically relevant to each of us for Scripture teaches because we are sinners by nature, we require mercy (cp. Rom. 3:10; Tit. 3:5). Thus, Paul begins with Who God is.

Next, Paul examines what God does. He "comforts us in all our troubles." The moment trouble comes, God's heart goes out to us. The prophet Isaiah had much to say about this, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (66:13). We may stand with confidence: when trouble comes, the Lord is on His way!

Paul further states, "we ourselves are comforted of God." Similarly, he indicates "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" (v. 6). The comfort of God puts strength in us. But how does He comfort us?

One way He comforts us is through *Holy Scripture* (cp. Rom. 15:4; Ps. 119:50). In fact trouble itself is a vehicle which drives us to the Word. We also gain comfort through the *Holy Spirit*. Jesus promised, I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you" (John 14:18). He spoke of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we gain comfort from God via His *saints* (cp. 7:6-7; Col. 4:7-8, 11). God's people can be comforting to each other in times of trouble. This is

Reflection Connection

Do you think of your own trials as times to learn in order to teach others? Why or why not?



specifically why the Apostle mentions “we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” When we experience God’s comfort, we are being equipped to comfort others. Candidly, this is a different way of looking at our troubles. However, plainly we are to minister to others through the strength God gives us.

Nor is the comfort we receive from our Lord small. Paul states “comfort abounds” (v. 5). The term “abound” means to “overflow.” We may easily picture the meaning if we imagine a river flooding out of its banks during an unusually heavy rain. You may be experiencing trouble now and feel like you are unable to survive. Realize our God is the God of fortitude! He will empower you and sustain you (v. 6). Therefore, we must remain steadfast: “And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation” (v. 7).

II. God is the Aim of Our Faith (vv. 8-20)

We noted above that God is the author of our fortitude, our strength. Now Paul affirms God is the aim of our faith. Every believer must trust God alone in his or her trouble. Hear the Apostle, “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: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (vv. 8-9).

Trouble is a part of the process of growth. Paul faces this reality head-on, and he does so by rehearsing his own experiences, “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us... .” Hence, Paul speaks first about the *fact* of trouble.

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Sooner or later, trouble comes to every child of God. Into each life rain must inevitably fall. While Paul is not specific in naming the trials he faced, he is clear as to their reality. Indeed, for Paul, the trials were virtually unbearable. He speaks of being “pressed out of measure,” a phrase indicative of being crushed under a heavy weight. The result? Paul “despaired of life”! Think about it; the Apostle Paul thought dying would be easier!

Secondly, note Paul’s assertion concerning the *function* of trouble (vv. 9b-10). Trouble teaches us many things including the lesson that we cannot trust in ourselves. God is the aim of our faith. And, why shouldn’t He be? God is the One Whose power “raises the dead.” The same One Who raises the dead “delivers” us (v. 10). The term “deliver” means “to draw to one’s self,” “to rescue.” God rescues His children (cp. Rom. 11:26; Ps. 116:8).

Third, Paul asserts the *fruit* of trouble (v. 11). According to the Apostle, both prayer and praise are offspring of the trouble we face. Consequently, we learn what Jesus can do with a life lived exclusively for Him. What does a life look like which is lived exclusively for Jesus? The Apostle says, “For our rejoicing is

Reflection Connection

Have you ever faced such difficulty you imagined dying would be better than living? Reflect deeply upon it. What got you through it? Be prepared to share with the entire class.



this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. For we write none other things unto you, that what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end; As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are our's in the day of the Lord Jesus" (vv. 12-14).

First, a life lived for Christ is a life of *sincerity*. The believer's internal testimony displays a conscience with "godly sincerity." Our motives in everything we do are to be sincere and filled with integrity. Also, motives should possess a "simplicity" about them. The term "simplicity" does not mean "simple" or "elementary." Instead, Paul means our motives should be free from any pretense, a basic honesty about everything we say and do.

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Second, a life lived for Christ is a life of *flexibility* (vv. 15-19). We must never cling to methods for methods' sake. Human plans are notoriously known for becoming quickly outdated. We must be clear, however; for neither does the Apostle confuse being fickle with being flexible. Our methods change but our message remains dependable (vv. 18-19).

Third, a life lived for Christ is a life of *certainty*. Paul writes, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (v. 20). Someone counted all the Bible promises of God and totaled them to be 8, 800. We live by promises; we do not live by explanations! Christ completes every promise we Biblically claim.

III. God is the Agent of Our Freedom (vv. 21-24)

Our faith aims high; we trust in the Almighty. When we do, God promises us deliverance; He assures us of rescue. Paul writes, "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (vv. 21-22). Interestingly, the verbs in these verses are all in the past tense indicative of completion. Hence, God has already given deliverance. When, you ask. The moment we said yes to God! The very second our hearts were changed in regeneration.

In the final verses of the chapter, Paul gives three beautiful symbols of the Holy Spirit.

First, we note the *anointing* of the Holy Spirit. He has "anointed us." Through God's Spirit, we have God's power in our hearts. Anointing, of course, means anointing with oil. Pouring oil over the head of a priest or King was a ritualistic service in ancient Israel. Even Jesus was anointed for service (cp. Acts 10:48; Luke 4:18). Jesus is the Christ, or literally, the "anointed one." Every believer

Reflection Connection

Do you think we have sufficient emphasis on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life? Why or why not?



has an anointing (1 John 2:20, 27). The filling of the Holy Spirit makes Christians spiritual (Rom. 5:5; Eph. 5:18). But the anointing makes Christians successful!

One might ask, precisely successful about what? For starters, anointed Christians are successful in their work for Jesus. To be saved is to be called to service. Anointing provides for us the power to serve God, to obey God.

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In addition, anointing makes Christians successful in their witness for Jesus. Jesus was anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor (Luke 4:18). The Holy Spirit provides a stirring witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. In our own power, we lack any ability to touch a human heart for God. However, the Holy Spirit anoints us, empowering us as God's witnesses.

Second, we note the *sealing* of the Spirit. Paul says God's Spirit has "sealed us." Sealing by the Holy Spirit assures protection by the Holy Spirit. When we are saved, we are sealed (Eph. 1:13). The salvation transaction is complete; the ownership is transferred. We were children of wrath. Through Christ's death at Calvary, we were purchased in full by His blood! The Holy Spirit seals us, branding us with the very marks of God's ownership!

Furthermore, the sealing is an eternal mark; that is, our salvation is forever complete. God says, in essence, we are eternally valuable to Him; we belong to Him forever (cp. 2 Tim. 2:19). Paul makes this perfectly clear elsewhere, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

Finally, we note the *earnest* of the Spirit. Indicative of this truth are Paul's words that the Father has "given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." God's down payment is given as a trust, a guarantee we are eternally His. The cross of Christ secured it in the past, present, and future! Hence, we possess a full redemption (Eph. 1:14), a redemption which includes our bodies (Rom. 8:23) and final home in Heaven with the Lord (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 2:9-10).

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul writes, "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God" (v. 21). The term translated "stablisheth" is the Greek term *bebaioo* and literally means "to make firm" or "to make reliable" in order to secure confidence and strengthen resolve. In the NT the term often signifies the confirmation of a person's salvation (cp. 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:21; Col. 2:7; Heb. 13:9). Paul explicitly says, it is none other than God Who makes us secure in Christ!

Wrap Up

Trouble is inevitable. Such a message sounds so weary in an age of indulgence, a culture ever pursuing pleasure. However, the Christian faith tells it like it is; the Bible keeps it real. We cannot live as if difficulties do not exist. Yet, we know we do not go it alone. God is the God of comfort! He is our strength and our deliverer. We aim our faith totally in Him. The Divine Agent—the wonderful Holy Spirit—empowers us, seals us, assures us, and protects us from any deadly difficulty the world has to offer. We belong to God! He never leaves His own.

