

COMFORTED AND COMFORTING

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A SERMON
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“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforts 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.”
2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

THE Apostle was a much-tried man and he lived in an age when all Believers were peculiarly tried. The persecutions of that time were excessively severe and every man who called himself a Christian had to carry his life in his hands. In this tribulation, the Apostle had the largest share, because he was the most prominent and indefatigable teacher that the Church of Christ then possessed. We have, here, a little insight into his inner life. He needed comfort and he received it. And he had it in such abundance that he became a comforter of others. Although, without Christ, he would have been, “of all men most miserable,” I think I may say that *with Christ* and the blessed hope of the Resurrection, he was among all men, one of the most happy.

In our text there are four things of which I would speak to you, dear Friends, hoping that they may bring good cheer to any who are cast down. The first is the comforting occupation in which Paul was employing himself—he was blessing God. “Blessed be God.” Then, secondly, we have the comforting titles which he gives to God—“The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.” Truly, they who know the Lord’s name do put their trust in Him. Paul knew the name of God right well and he used the most appropriate name for the time of sorrow. Then, thirdly, we shall have to consider for a little while the comforting fact which the Apostle here states, “Who comforts us in all our tribulation.” And, lastly, we shall try to see the comforting design of it all—“That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

I. First, then, you who mourn and are troubled and cast down, are invited to consider THE COMFORTING OCCUPATION of the Apostle.

Most of Paul’s 14 Epistles begin with praise to God and he often breaks out into a doxology when you are hardly expecting it. He lays down his pen, bows his knees to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and pours out a flood of thanksgiving to the Most High. Here was a man who never knew but what he might be dead the next day, for his enemies were many, and cruel, and mighty. And yet he spent a great part of his time in praising and blessing God!

This comforting occupation *argues that his heart was not crushed and vanquished by his troubles*. Paul was sore beset in many ways, yet he could say, and he did say, “Blessed be God.” Job was greatly tried and sorely bereaved, but he still said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” And as long as we can keep the blessing of God to the front, it is a sure sign that whatever the adversary may have been able to take away from us, he has not taken away our confidence, which has great recompense of reward and, whatever he may have crushed, he has not crushed our heart! He may have surrounded it with bitterness, but the heart itself is not made bitter—it is a fountain that sends out a stream of sweet waters, such as this utterance of the Apostle, “Blessed be God.”

It is glorious to see how the Grace of God will enable a man to endure all the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil—how he will be laid aside by sickness and his pains will be multiplied. How reproach may go far to break his heart, how he may be depressed in spirit and lose all temporal benefits—and yet he will still be able to say, “Blessed be the name

of the Lord.” “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” “Let Him do what He pleases with me, I have made no stipulation with Him that I will only praise Him when He does according to my will. I will praise Him when He has His own way with me, even though it runs exactly contrary to mine.” It is a brave heart that still, under all pressures, gives forth only this cry, “Blessed be God.” O dear Friends, if you want to keep up your hearts—if you desire to be established and sustained, if you wish to prevent the enemy from overcoming you—let this be your comfortable occupation and say with the poet—

*“I will praise You every day,
Now Your anger’s turned away.”*

Nothing can keep your head above the waters of trouble better than crying, “Bless the Lord, O my Soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.”

This occupation shows that the Apostle had not gratified Satan, for the devil’s purpose, so far as he has had to do with our trouble, is to make us “curse God and die.” After all the sorrow that Satan was permitted to bring to Job, the Patriarch’s heart still blessed the name of the Lord! So the devil was defeated—he could not carry out his own evil purpose and he had to slink away like a whipped cur—for Job glorified God instead of bringing dishonor upon His holy name. The tried and troubled ones who can still cry, “Blessed be the name of the Lord,” are not driven to despair, for despair shuts the mouth and makes a man sit in sullen silence, or else it opens his lips in bitter complaints and in multiplied murmurings. But, when a man can truly say, “Blessed be God,” then despair has not mastered him. He still holds his own and he has on his side a far greater force than the devil—and the most trying circumstances—can bring to bear upon him to vanquish him! O Friends, if you are afraid of being overcome, take to praising God! If you are in trouble and do not know how to bear it, divert your thoughts by praising God! Get away from the present trial by blessing and magnifying His holy name!

Next, this state of mind which made the Apostle say, “Blessed be God,” *prophesied that God would speedily send him something to call forth new praises*. When a man blesses God for the bitter, the Lord often sends him the sweet. If he can praise God in the night, the daylight is not far off. There never was a heart that waited and wanted to praise God but the Lord soon gave it opportunities of lifting up Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to Him. It shall never be said that we were ready to praise God, but that God was not ready to bless us! So, dear Friends, praise God and He will bless you! Praise God and exalt Him, and He will soon lift you up out of your troubles. I look upon a murmuring spirit as the forewarning of stormy weather in a *rebellious soul*—and I regard a praiseful spirit as the forecast of a happy time to come to the *loyal joyous soul*. God has prepared the heart to receive the joy which, otherwise, it might not have been fit to accept at His hands. Be comforted, then, dear Friends, if you find in your hearts the desire to praise God—and belief that the Lord will find in His heart the willingness to speedily bless you!

This comforting occupation *profits the Believer in many ways*. One advantage of blessing God is that it takes a man’s thoughts off his own trials and sorrows. We make our troubles much greater than they need be by turning them over, considering them from all points of view, weighing them and thinking and meditating upon them. You know very well that if you swallow a pill, you do not taste it—but if you get it between your teeth and bite and chew it, you will get all the bitter flavor of the drug. So, it is often a good thing to let our afflictions go right down into our soul, to swallow them at once, and say no more about them. God has sent them and, therefore, they are for your good—but when you keep brooding over your grief, you will probably hatch something out of it which you did not expect—it may be that you will find a young scorpion come from it to annoy you! They that will always be thinking upon their trials will soon find a sorrow within the sorrow which, haply, they might never have perceived if they had let it go! While we are blessing God, we are, at least for the time, taking our thoughts off our troubles and, so far, so good.

Moreover, we shall, by God’s gracious help, while we are praising Him, be lifting our soul out of our sorrow. In America, for many years they kept a day of fasting, but somebody suggested that they had better keep an annual day of thanksgiving—and they have done so ever since! The change was a good one and you and I, though sometimes we must fast, especially if the Bridegroom shall hide His face, will also find that it is a great improvement when we can turn our day of fasting into a day of thanksgiving! Do you not think, dear Friends, that sometimes, when you are very heavy of heart, it would be the best possible thing if you were to say, with Martin Luther, “Come, let us sing a Psalm and startle the devil”? If you sit down and groan and complain against God, your groans will be music to Satan’s malevolent heart!

But you will vex and grieve him, if, instead of doing so, you say, “No, foul fiend, you shall never persuade me to rob God of His Glory—He shall have His full revenue of praise from me, whether I am on my bed, sick, or able to be up and actively engaged in the duties of my calling. Whether I stand well with my fellow men, or my name has an ill savor to them, God’s name has not an ill savor and, therefore, I will praise and bless Him even though nobody will praise me.”

O Beloved, if your heart is sad within you, praising God will so lift it up that you will even be able to forget the trouble of the present hour! What does the eagle do when the fowler is about with his net and gun? Why, the noble bird takes to his wings and flies upwards towards the sun! And, though his bright eyes can see the foe, he knows that no bullet can reach him at that great height. So, if you Christians have close communion with your God and praise and magnify His holy name, the shots of the enemy shall not reach you—you will have risen far beyond their range. Therefore, you see the excellence of blessing and praising the Most High.

Besides, this occupation may well tend to take away the sorrows of our mortality, since, by praising God, we get a taste of the joys of *immortality*. What are the angels doing now? I cannot tell you what men all over the world are doing, but I can tell you what the angels are doing! The holy spirits before the Throne of God find it is their very Heaven to be always blessing their God! So, if you want a sip of Heaven’s bliss. If on your leaf you would have a sparkling dew-drop which would tell you what the River of Life that flows at the right hand of God is like, commence at once to praise and bless the Lord your God—

*“I would begin the music here,
And so my soul would rise!
Oh for some heavenly notes to bear
My passions to the skies!”*

And there is no better way of anticipating the joys of being there than by beginning the praises of God while here!

You may also destroy your distresses by singing praises to God. By blessing the Lord, you may set your foot upon the neck of your adversaries—you can sing yourself right up from the deeps by God’s gracious help. Out of the very depths you may cry unto the Lord till He shall lift you up and you shall praise Him *in excelsis*—in the very highest—and magnify His name! I give you this as one of the shortest and surest recipes for comfort—begin to praise God. The next time that a friend comes in to see you, do not tell him how long the wind has been blowing from the North, how cold the weather is for this season of the year, how your poor bones ache, how little you have coming in and all your troubles—he has probably heard the sad story many times before! Instead of that, tell him what the Lord has done for you and make him feel that the Lord is good. Your griefs and your troubles speak for themselves, but your mercies are often dumb—so try, therefore, to give them a tongue and praise the Lord with all your heart!

II. Time would fail me if I dwelt, as I would like to dwell, upon the first point, so we must advance to the second, which is, THE COMFORTING TITLES which the Apostle gives to God in our text.

The first title we may call *a name of affinity*—“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh, how near that brings God to us—that He is the Father of Jesus, the Father of Christ, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”—because Jesus has espoused our nature and become a Man. Though He is, “Light of light” and, “very God of very God,” yet is He also our Brother! “Father of Jesus”—what a delightful title that is for the good and glorious God! The great Jehovah has become very near of kin to you, my sorrowing Brother, for His Son is your Brother, your Husband, your Head and, now, the Father of Jesus is the Father of every Believer, so He is your Father if you are one of those who trust His Son! A child may not have a penny in his pocket, yet he feels quite rich enough if he has a wealthy father. You may be very, very poor, but, oh, what a rich Father you have! Jesus Christ’s Father is your Father! And as He has exalted His own dear Son, He will do the same for you in due time. Our Lord Jesus is the first-born among many brethren and the Father means to treat the other brethren even as He treats Him. Your Father has made you one of His heirs—yes, a joint heir with Jesus Christ—what more would you have? Therefore, comfort yourself with this blessed Truth of God! If you are distressed and troubled, this fact—that God is Christ’s Father and your Father—ought to be quite sufficient, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, to fill you with intense joy!

In addition to this name of affinity, Paul gives to God a title which is *a name of gratitude*—“The Father of mercies.” Then every mercy I have ever had has been begotten of God, who is “the Father of mercies”! All temporal mercies come to God’s people from their Father. It is He who gives us bread to eat and clothes to put on. We are happy to be able to see in these common mercies a peculiar touch of the benign hand. But as for the high and heavenly mercies, the ever-

lasting mercies, the satisfying mercies—the soul-filling mercies—these all come from God! As every beam of light comes from the father of lights [the sun], so do all mercies come from God. As all the rivers would be dried up if the sea were dry—for that is the ultimate source of the earth’s moisture—so would all our mercies be dried-up mercies, barren mercies, no mercies at all if they did not come from that great ocean of mercies, the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Well, now, Beloved, as your Father is “the Father of mercies,” can you not go to Him for all the mercy you need? If your mercies seem, just now, to be very few, can you not go to the All-Merciful and ask Him to deal out to you from His abundant store, for, “His mercy endures forever”?

The third title which Paul applies to God ought to afford the deepest possible consolation to your soul. I venture to call it *a name of hope*. “The God of all comfort.” All sorts of comforts are stored up in God. No matter what you may require to bear you up under your affliction, God has just the kind of comfort which you need—and He is ready to bestow it upon you! Rest assured of that and also believe that He will bestow it upon you if you ask it at His hands. Oh, I think this is a name full of good cheer to everyone who has grown weary because of the trials of the way through this great and terrible wilderness! God is the God of all comfort—not merely of some comfort, but of *all* comfort. If you need every kind of comfort that was ever given to men, God has it in reserve and He will give it to you! If there are any comforts to be found by God’s people in sickness, in prison, in need, in depression—the God of all comfort will deal them out to you according as you have need of them!

This title is also *a name of discrimination*. It applies both to the persons and to the comfort—“who comforts us...by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.” There are some things which are called comforts of which God is not the dispenser. Alas, alas, how many persons there are who fly to the bottle when they are in distress! That is *their* comfort—they drink and, for a while, forget their misery—but the process only leads to still greater misery and degradation. We cannot say that God is the God of such comfort as that! Indeed, we do not reckon it to be comfort! Some there are who turn to dissipation that they may forget their grief. God is not the God of dissipation and, therefore, that is not a comfort to a child of God—it would only increase his misery. If he were to be dragged to it, it would not relieve his pains in the least. Whatever there is in the world—and there are many such things which men call comforts—if you cannot be sure that they are such as God sends, let them be no source of consolation to you, but rather regard them with horror! May every child of God be able to make this discrimination and say, “If God does not give me what I look upon as a comfort, it will not prove to be a comfort.”

It is not a creature who supplies the comfort, it is only the Creator. The comfort may be brought to us by a creature, and brought in God’s name, but it must come from Him! The reason why bread feeds us is because God chooses to make it do so. When medicine heals us, it is because Jehovah makes it the means of healing. But if God does not work with the means, no cure will be worked. You who have the Creator, Himself, as your Comforter, are like the man who has a well in his garden—he may not have a tap to turn it off and on when he needs a supply of water to run through the pipe, but he has the well, itself, from which he may draw as much as he needs. Remember what we sang just now—

*“Why should the soul a drop bemoan,
Who has a fountain near?
A fountain which will always run
With waters sweet and clear?”*

So much, then, upon the comforting titles which Paul uses in relation to God. I pray you to act like the bees when they dive into the petals of the flowers and suck out their honey—dive into these titles and extract the delicious honey which the Holy Spirit has stored there for you.

III. Now, thirdly, I am to speak of THE COMFORTING FACT which Paul here mentions. “The God of all comfort...comforts us in all our tribulation.”

This was Paul’s declaration and I, also, may speak in the name of many here present and say, “That is not only true of Paul, and the Christians in his day, but it is also true of us.” *The God of all comfort has comforted us in our tribulation*. Look back, now, on the pages of your diary that bear the record of your sorrow—do they not also bear the record of the Lord’s help in the sorrow and His deliverance from the sorrow? If I cannot speak for all of you, I will speak for myself. I must do so, or else surely the very timber on which I stand might cry out against me! The Lord has been very gracious to me in many an hour of affliction. Blessed be His name, He has never failed to bring the solace when He has

made the smart—and if there has been the stroke with the rod, there has very soon been the caress of His love to follow the blow of His hand. It has been so with many of us.

But Paul speaks in the present tense—“Who comforts us in all our tribulation”—and we can also declare that *God is now comforting us who believe in Jesus*. Did you, Beloved, come into this building somewhat heavy in spirit? You are not half so heavy, now, as you were—and if you will take the good advice I am trying to give, you will go away quite relieved. Rutherford used to say that the Cross of Christ was no more a burden to the man who knew how to carry it than wings are to a bird or sails are to a ship! An affliction is a help to us, not a hindrance, when Grace comes with it to sanctify it! Remember what David said, long ago—“Cast your burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain you: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” But if you cast your burden upon the Lord, do not go looking for it when I have pronounced the benediction—leave it altogether! The fault with many of us is that when we have cast our burden upon the Lord, we beg Him to let us have it back! And if He grants our foolish request, it comes back twice as heavy as it was before. Oh, that we were wise enough to leave our troubles with our Father who is in Heaven as little children leave things with their father! Then we shall find that He comforts us in all our tribulation.

Yes, but our text is true of the future as well as the present. Here, if we cannot speak by experience, we can speak by faith. A little child who loves his father has no doubt about his father’s comforting him next year as well as this. And you must have no doubt about what God will do for you, dear Friends, especially you aged ones. When the veterans begin to waver and doubt, I do not know what excuse to make for them. I remember the story of one who said she was afraid she would be starved. Someone asked her, “How old are you?” “Seventy-five,” she replied. “How long have you been a Christian?” “Fifty years.” “Your Heavenly Father has fed you these 50 years and yet you fear that He will let you starve during the last few years you are likely to be here?” It was very wrong of the poor old soul—mind that you do not imitate her! It is due to every honest man that we should speak of him as we have found him—but much more is it due to our faithful God! He *has* comforted, He *is* comforting and He *will* comfort. And Paul puts it in such a way as to make us feel that *He will never leave off comforting us even for a single moment*. “Who comforts us in all our tribulation”—not in some of it, but in *all* of it! Our tribulations sometimes change and a new cross is generally a very heavy one. The old crosses get, at last, to fit the back and we can carry them better than we could at the first—but a new cross galls the shoulders that have not yet grown used to it. But the Lord your God will help you in your new tribulations as well as in your old ones! And if they come thick and threefold—tribulation upon tribulation, trouble upon trouble—still, as your days, so shall your strength be, and He who has comforted and is comforting, will continue to comfort you even to the last!

IV. Now I must close with just a few remarks upon THE COMFORTING DESIGN of which our text speaks.

Why does God lay trouble upon His people and comfort them in it? *It is that He may make them comforters of others*—“that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” A man who has never had any trouble is very awkward when he tries to comfort troubled hearts. Hence, the minister of Christ, if he is to be of much use in God’s service, must have great trouble. “Prayer, meditation, and affliction,” says Melancthon, “are the three things that make the minister of God.” There must be prayer. There must be meditation and there must be affliction. You cannot pronounce the promise correctly in the ears of the afflicted unless you, yourself, have known its preciousness in your own hour of trial. It is God’s will that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, should often work by men according to that ancient word of His, “Comfort you, comfort you My people, says your God. Speak you comfortably to Jerusalem.” These comforting men are to be made—they are not born so—and they have to be made by passing through the furnace, themselves. They cannot comfort others unless they have had trouble and have been comforted in it.

More than this, *the intent of God is to make us able comforters*—“that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” Some have the will to comfort the troubled, but they have not the power to do it. “Miserable comforters are you all,” said Job to his friends! And the same has been said to many of those who have really tried to comfort the sorrowing, but who, in the process, have put their fingers into the open wounds and so made them worse instead of better. Brethren, the able comforter must be a man who knows both the trial and the promise that is suited to meet it.

Beside that, *we are to be ready comforters*, for we are “to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Experimental knowledge helps a man to speak with power to the afflicted soul. He who has taken a certain medicine and proved the benefit of it, is the man to recommend it to another.

Hence, the Lord often passes His ministers through trials which they would never have to endure if it were not for their people. Even as upon the Chief Shepherd, all the wanderings of the flock had to be laid, so, in a very minor sense, the wanderings of the flock must be borne by the under-shepherd, or else he cannot be a comforter to them. Dear Friends, the next time you get into any trouble, I would recommend you to take notes of it and to ask yourself, when it is over, “How did God comfort me?” Lay that cordial up in store, because, one of these days, you will need that comfort, again, or, if not, you will meet with somebody who is in just the same fix as you were in—and you will be able to say, “I know what will help you, for I have it down in black and white at home, how God helped me in a trouble exactly like yours.”

As I was reading a book, this afternoon, this sentence struck me—“whenever you come into the mouth of the furnace, say to yourself, ‘God has some great work for me to do and He is preparing me for it.’” I thought to myself, “I have not often said that in the time of trial. My thoughts have been too much taken up with the furnace to think of the good which was to result from the fire.” But I am sure that what that writer said is true—God means to do something more by us, which, speaking after the manner of men, He cannot yet do by us. We are not qualified for it. But He is going to put us through a still hotter furnace—the heat is to be more intense than any we have yet borne—and when we come out, we shall be more fit for the Master’s use!

Welcome your trials, then, Beloved! Open wide your doors and say to tribulations, “Come in, come in! This is the place where you are to lodge, for my Master said, ‘In the world you shall have tribulation.’” Welcome even that black trouble that has a mask on its face—it is no adversary coming to kill you—when the mask is taken off, you will see that, underneath it there is a bright smiling face! Some of us can say to affliction, “Come in and welcome, for the costliest jewels we ever possessed were brought by you! You have done us more good than all our joys put together.” We would have had no harvest if God had left us like the hard road outside the field. But the soil has been cut up by the sharp plow and often our very soul has been grievously tried as the harrow and the cultivator have gone over us, again and again! But all these processes have caused us to bring forth fruit to the praise and glory of God! Therefore, I say again, welcome your troubles! Do not be sorry if they travel with you for a while, for they are good guests. Many a time, by entertaining trouble, we have “entertained angels unawares.” God bless you, Brothers and Sisters, by making you a comfort to others! And probably it will be through the very trials which greatly vex you!

Now to close, there may be some poor soul here broken down under a sense of sin, some seeker who cannot find the Savior. He may speak to some of you who were brought to Christ without any strong emotion. He will begin telling you about his despair and you will look at him and say, “Dear me, where has this man come from?” Then do not try to help him, for you cannot—you have not had the experience through which he is passing. Go find the Brother who had a hard time of it in getting to the Wicket Gate, that poor fellow who tumbled into the Slough of Despond with his big burden on his back and nearly got choked in the mire. Say to him, “Brother Christian, here is another soul floundering about just as you were.” Hand him over to such a person because he will be the most likely to help him. Any of you who had great difficulty in laying hold of Christ at the first ought to be on the watch to find others who are as you were—stretch out the helping hand to them and say, “We would not have you suffer as we did if we can help it. We wish to show you the way to Jesus Christ and to get you to see it more quickly than we did. We even hope that you will, this very night, find joy and peace in believing.”

Do look after the broken-hearted ones, dear Friends! Watch for Mr. Feeble-Mind. Be on the look-out for poor Mr. Fearing, do not let them lie outside long. Help them over the wall and, as you have found mercy, administer it, in the name of God, to all who are longing to find it! May God bless you all, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-20.*

Verse 1. *Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.* Paul is very careful to remind the Corinthians of that fact, since some of them had gone the length of denying his Apostleship altogether.

1. *And Timothy our brother.* Whom, in all humility, he associates with himself, although he was a younger man, of far less consequence. But Paul loved him very much and, therefore, he put his name at the beginning of this Epistle side by side with his own—“and Timothy our brother.”

1, 2. *Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.* Christianity is a religion of benedictions! Whereas worldly people often use the language of courtesy towards one another without meaning what they say, the saints of God put a fullness of meaning into their expressions and really wish every good thing to those to whom they write. “Grace be to you.” That comes first, and then peace follows. Peace without Grace is a very dangerous possession. But a peace that grows out of the possession of Grace is a gracious peace and will lead to the peace of Heaven before long. This Grace and peace are to come “from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” There is no Grace for us apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. And though the Father is full of love and will give Grace and peace to His people, yet the Lord Jesus Christ must always be the channel through which these incomparable favors must flow to them!

3, 4. *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforts 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.* Nothing less, then, shall be given to the tried people of God than that same comfort which was enjoyed by the Apostle Paul! It shall be shared by all who are resting where Paul rested.

5. *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ.* The Apostles were the most tried, but they were the most comforted. They had to stand the brunt of the battle, but the Lord was their strength in a very special sense. Observe the balance in this verse—“as the sufferings,” “so our consolation.” And “as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ.” With little trial, we may expect little comfort. It is better to leave the whole matter entirely with God, or else we might almost desire to be dug about by the spade of affliction, that we might receive more of the living waters of consolation!

6. *And whether we are 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 are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.* That is the grand objective of Christians, to live for others! When God has helped us to receive both our comforts and our sorrows as matters of trust that we are to take care of for the benefit of our fellow Christians, then have we learned the lesson which Christ would teach us by them!

7. *And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so shall you also be of the consolation.* How these things are put together! God does not call His people to the one without the other—no consolation without affliction and, blessed be His name, no affliction without 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.* Why would Paul have them know this but that they might understand that he had to suffer as they did, and even more? Sometimes God’s people are apt to think that their ministers are not cast down as they are. They look upon them as a sort of superior order of beings who have no doubts and fears, no lack of strength, no despair. But that is an idle fiction and the sooner it is gone from our minds, the better! For those who lead the people of God will rather have *more* afflictions than less. Seeing that they need more instruction than others need, and that instruction usually comes with the rod—in all probability they will have more of the rod than others will. Paul, therefore, is anxious that the Corinthians should know in what seas of trouble he had to swim.

9, 10. *But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raises the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.* It is supposed by some that the Apostle was in danger of being put to death in some extraordinary way—perhaps by wild beasts in the amphitheatre. We know that he speaks of having fought with beasts at Ephesus. We cannot tell whether there is any allusion, here, to that trial, or what it was. But it was evidently some death which, to the Apostle, seemed to be exceedingly terrible. And when he was delivered from it, it was to him like a resurrection! He speaks of it as having been worked by God that raises the dead. And he puts down this deliverance, together with some other of which he was at that very time the subject—“and does deliver”—and upon these experiences he builds his expectation that God “will yet deliver.”

11. *You 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.* When many pray, after the blessings is received, many will give thanks. Paul rejoices to have been the object of interest to a large number of Christians everywhere in the time of his great peril. And when he escaped, he believed he would still be the object of their interest and that there would be more prayer in the

world, and more praise, too, because of the dangers from which God had delivered him. It is worth while for any of us to be in sore sickness, or in great straits, if, thereby, the quantity of prayer and praise in the world shall be increased to God's Glory!

12. *For our rejoicing is 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.* For to them he had been specially particular, that in no point they should speak of him as having used the wisdom of words. Among them he determined not to know anything except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. To them he was like the nurse who administers milk to babes.

13, 14. *For we write none other things unto you, than what you read or acknowledge; and I trust you shall acknowledge even to the end; as also you have acknowledged us in part.* Some of them disputed his Apostleship, but most of them did not—

14. *That we are your rejoicing, even as you, also, are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.* What a happy condition of things it is when the teacher and the taught mutually rejoice in each other! When the teacher is the joy of the flock and when he can rejoice in his people! This is profitable to all, but when there are discards, and fault-finding and the like, this is neither glorifying to God nor profitable to the people.

15-17. *And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that you might have a second benefit; and to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judea. When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? Or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes, and no, no?* There were some in the Church at Corinth who said, "He promised to come and see us, but he did not keep his word." They declared that his promise could not be depended upon and that he very easily changed his mind. Now the Apostle had done nothing of the kind! He had solid reasons for his change of purpose and reasons full of love to them—but they misrepresented him. Do not, my dear Friends, count the fiery trial of misrepresentation to be any strange thing! Even some of those whom you have loved and for whom you have been willing to lay down your lives will turn against you! It is no new thing that they should do so. They may take anything which you have done in the simplicity of your heart and turn it against you. Whenever they do so, I say again, do not think that any strange thing has happened to you—it happened to Paul—then why should not you have a similar experience?

18-20. *But as God is true, our word toward you was not yes and no. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yes and no, but in Him was yes. For all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him, Amen, unto the glory of God by us.* Paul loved to turn from some lower subject to his Lord. When he wrote the words, "yes and no," they suggested to him the perfect constancy of the love of Christ and thankfulness for His faithful promises. So, as the thought came into his mind, he could do no other than put it into the Epistle he was writing, for he never missed an opportunity of praising the Lord Jesus Christ! I wish we could all imitate him, in this respect, far more than we have ever done, for, our Savior is worthy of all the praise we can ever give Him—and more, too!

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