

Session 6

February 16, 2020

WHERE DOES COMFORT COME FROM?

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

James' encouragement to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2) is easier said than done! Sure, tests and trials increase our faith. And yes, working through difficult times ultimately produces patience. But the pathway to such virtues is certainly painful. So where do we turn for relief in the *midst* of our anguish? In our focal passage, the apostle Paul offers three sources of comfort for those who hurt.

Comfort from God (v. 3-4). Since God is the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), it is no surprise that He is the source of comfort in our times of distress. As always, the Trinity works in concert. God declared, "I, even I, am He who comforts you" (Is. 51:12). Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4), and "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the Comforter" in John 14 and 16, and Luke said His comfort "was multiplied" in the churches throughout the region (Acts 9:31). Paul's statement here is the most inclusive anywhere in the Bible. Notice the richness of the language: He's the Father of *our* Lord, the Father of *mercies*, and the God of *all comfort*, who *comforts us in all our affliction*. Paul makes it clear that God's comfort is available to *all* God's children (himself included) and in every hurtful circumstance. For this, He is praised. The lesson for us? *When we hurt, we can find comfort in our God.*

Comfort from the church (v. 4-7). Paul makes much of suffering that identifies us with Christ. One of his goals was to identify with Christ so intimately that he understood both the "power of His resurrection," and the "fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). In these verses, Paul suggested that the sufferings Christ endured "overflow" to those who serve Him. Jesus reminded His disciples that "a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). The good news is that comfort also overflows to those who serve Him (v. 5). In both the sufferings that come and the subsequent deliverance God offers, the apostle saw great benefit for the church. While the statements are drawn from his own personal experience, the application is certainly for all believers: we suffer and receive God's comfort so that we can in turn share both the experience and that comfort with others who need it. The lesson for us? *When we hurt, we can find comfort in those in the church who have experienced both despair and God's deliverance.*

Comfort from prayer (v. 8-11). Again, the apostle draws on his own experiences. This time, he uses them to demonstrate the comfort found in communal praying. The word "affliction" (v. 8) comes from the word *pressure*. No specifics are offered, but the term is broad enough to cover physical dangers, persecution, imprisonment, and even illness, all of which occurred on Paul's journeys as recorded in Acts. The extent of Paul's afflictions—and those with him—were sufficiently serious that they "despaired of life" (v. 8); that is, they felt absolutely hopeless, even to the point that they assumed they would die (v. 9). The only hope they dared grasp was the faithfulness of God who had delivered them in the past, and who they knew could deliver them again (v. 10). The immediate addition of verse 11, "while you join in helping us by your prayers"

is not an afterthought but expresses the *means* by which God so often delivers His children from their afflictions. When many pray, and many see God work through prayer, then many rejoice in the results of prayer. The lesson for us? *When we hurt, we can find comfort in the prayers of God's faithful people.*