

God's Comfort in Trials
2 Corinthians 1:3-14
April 29

I learned a difficult lesson early in ministry. Despite my desire to serve the Lord, at times, the response of God's people to my ministry was less than enthusiastic. During this time, I received comfort in the fact that Paul himself experienced challenges to his integrity and ministry. The major theme of 2 Corinthians is Paul's defense of his ministry against charges of a lack of integrity, vacillation, allowing others to intimidate him.

Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth is difficult to reconstruct. After our present 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote a harsh letter, made a painful visit, and sent Titus and Timothy to deal with the situation. Paul did not give up on his relationship with this troubled church. The apostle continually went the extra-mile in the hopes of restored fellowship.

What principles may we derive from Paul's life during a difficult time in his ministry to believers?

First, every believer should praise God as the source of his or her comfort (2 Cor. 1:3). Rather than his normal prayer, Paul blessed God. "Blessed" translates the Greek word eulogy – to speak well. We limit a eulogy to good words spoken about the dead; Paul spoke well of the living God. Paul praised God as the source of mercies and comfort. Comfort, the same root as paraclete in Jesus's reference to the Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel, refers to God's encouragement and strength through divine intervention in the midst of every trial we encounter.

Second, God calls every believer receives a ministry of comfort/encouragement to others (2 Cor. 1:4). Through His ministry of comfort, God purposes to equip a believer for a ministry of comfort to others. God intends that every blessing He grants to you become a resource through which you can help other people. Ask yourself the following question, "Under what difficult circumstances did God dramatically intervene in your life?" Based on your testimony, God may call you to reach out to others experiencing grief, financial challenges, or problem marriages. David Garland reminds us, "God does not comfort us to make us comfortable but to make us comforters."

Third, every believer should derive comfort from the truth that our Lord suffered (2 Cor. 1:5). Some so-called preachers today proclaim a "health and wealth" gospel that claims that God wants every believer to be wealthy and healthy – a life without problems. This errant theology confuses the gospel of Christ with the American dream. Christian commitment, indeed, may increase our affliction. I know Christians passed over for promotion because of a refusal to participate in drunken office parties. Christians face persecution in many parts of the world. Remember believer that our suffering pales in comparison to the suffering of Christ.