

Introduction

At the start of the letter, we see a thanksgiving for God's provision of comfort in the midst of suffering. Several assertions are made in this text that we need to apprehend. All of them revolve around the key words *comfort* and *trouble*.

The idea of *comfort* is that of peace, calmness of soul, even in the face of difficulty. It includes the lifting of one's spirits.

On the other hand is the idea of trouble, tribulation or affliction. The words used for this denote distress, oppression, difficult circumstances. The distress can be that brought by outward circumstances or can be the inward experience of distress of soul. In this passage it specifically refers to an experience that Paul had in Asia Minor (1:8), probably some sort of persecution, but is applicable to a wider range of situations.

A sequence of statements is made that leads us to a wonderful understanding of how God comforts us when we face troubles. Here they are:

1. We have a compassionate and comforting Father – v. 3

As often the case, the epistles begin with a thanksgiving to God. In this instance, it says "blessed be the God and Father." To "bless" someone means to praise them, to glorify them, or to honor them for something. This ascription of praise amounts to a giving of thanks for God's merciful and comforting character.

A. The Character of God – Mercy

"The Father of mercies" indicates that God is totally characterized by mercy. **Ps. 86:15** tells us that mercy is part of God's loving character. **Ps. 136:2** tells us that God's mercy lasts forever. **1 Peter 1:3** says that we are born again in accord with God's abundant mercy. In 2 Cor., we are sustained in troubles by His mercy.

B. The Source of Comfort – God

Again here we see that our God is characterized by "all comfort." The adjective "all" brings out the great extent of the comfort that is available from Him.

2. God comforts us when we are in trouble – v. 4a

This verse very plainly teaches that God does comfort us. You don't have to wonder about it—it's just true. You might sometimes have trouble discerning the comfort, but this should not discourage you from knowing that God is providing comfort for the distressing situation.

Note that it says "in all our tribulations," not "out of them!" So we get aid to go through the trial (**1 Cor. 10:13**). We'll see later that trials cause us to throw our total dependence on God instead of ourselves (**1:9**).

3. The purpose of God's comfort is for us to bring comfort to others – v. 4b

Do you see the flow of thought? These points are not disconnected ideas, but the fact is that God who is the merciful Father and God who is the source of all comfort gives us that comfort when we are in trouble. Then we in turn can administer that very same comfort to others in their trouble. What a concept! Comfort is pictured as a physical quantity that we receive and then pass on to someone else. Of course it is more abstract than that, but notice some more details about this chain of comfort:

A. We can extend comfort to those in any trouble. The idea emphasized is that when we experience the comfort of God in our troublesome situation, we are better equipped to extend comfort to those in "any kind of trouble." No, you don't have to have stubbed your little toe to extend comfort to someone who has done so. Maybe you stubbed your big toe ☹. The point is, when you learn about God's comfort and experience it, you can help someone else in a struggle—and it can be of a different sort than the one you have.

B. We comfort others with the same comfort we get from God. We turn the comfort that God gave us into comfort for others. Thinking about this a little more, it seems that through trials that we face, we have to watch and learn how we received comfort from God. Then, we assimilate that and become able to share it with others. We do not get bogged down in the trial itself so that we cannot learn anything—becoming bitter and ignoring what God is doing through the situation is not the right approach! We also have to watch and care for others enough to share comfort with them. Paul did both of these things, obviously.

4. The comfort of God comes in measure with the trouble – v. 5

That is basically what Paul means when he says that "as the sufferings of Christ abound...so our consolation also abounds." The as-so tells us this as much.

The phrase "sufferings of Christ" commonly refers to those sufferings that Christ underwent at the cross (**1 Peter 1:11, 5:1**). However, in this case, Paul is not referring to the atoning sufferings of Christ for sin, because those sufferings only occurred once (**Heb. 9:28, 10:10, 12, 14**) in the past (**Rom. 5:6, 8**). Paul is actually referring to his own participation in "the sufferings of Christ" which means the persecution of believers (**1 Peter 4:12-13, Col. 1:24**). These persecutions are felt by Christ himself (**Acts 9:4-5**). Such suffering for a godly life are not uncommon for true believers, and Paul had his share of them.

The Lord Jesus Christ ensures that "as our days, so shall our strength be." Don't expect God's comfort to come in meagerness—it "abounds" just like the sufferings do.

5. Whether Paul is afflicted or comforted, it is to the Corinthians' good – v. 6

Here we get to a part of the text more focused on the particulars of the situation surrounding the letter. Paul is saying here that if he suffers affliction, it is for the good of the Corinthians. Namely, he will therefore receive consolation and be able to minister the same to them. This will help them along in their trials as they move toward their final salvation.

On the other hand, he says, if we look at it from the comfort side of the equation, the same thing results. In other words, if you look at the down side or the up side of things, in either case it allows us to minister comfort to you.

This comfort is "effective" or "energetic" for them to work through trials even of the magnitude that Paul suffered. The comfort causes them to patiently endure the situation.

6. Paul is confident that the Corinthians will persevere through trouble – v. 7

Paul has participated in those sufferings often; he expects that the Corinthian believers will be or are already facing this as well and will also receive comfort. He has confidence that they won't turn away from God through the troubles because they will receive comfort in the measure they need it.

Conclusion

We see here Divine comfort in Divinely-permitted trials. Even in the most difficult of circumstances, you still can rest on the truth that God is sovereign, in control of all. Maybe the situation is confusing and unclear. Go back to what you know about God's character for comfort. As we have said many times before, uses means to this end. He doesn't just speak into your ear to make you feel at peace. He gives comfort in many ways:

1. Through comforting circumstances – 2 Cor. 7:4, 7, 13; Acts 15:31.
2. Through the Bible – Rom. 15:4.
3. Through the declaration of God's word ("prophecy") – 1 Cor. 14:3.
4. Through God's promises – Heb. 6:18. Note "strong consolation."
5. Through God's character – Rom. 15:5, as in 2 Cor. 1:3-7.
6. Through Jesus Christ – 2 Cor. 1:5, 2 Thess. 2:16-17 (everlasting comfort).
7. Through the Holy Spirit – Acts 9:31.
8. Through people – Acts 4:36, Barnabas, the "son of encouragement."
9. Through prayer – Php. 4:6-7.

Day by day and with each passing moment, strength I find to meet my trials here...MAP