

Review

The Bible made (and still makes) several important points in the previous verses. These were:

1. We have a compassionate and comforting Father – v. 3.
2. God comforts us when we are in trouble – v. 4a.
3. The purpose of God's comfort is so we can comfort others – v. 4b.
4. As trouble increases, so does comfort – v. 5.
5. Affliction or comfort for Paul both helped the Corinthians – v. 6.
6. Paul is confident the Corinthians will not give up in troubles – v. 7.

In verses 8 through 11, the apostle turns to the specifics of the trial that he had faced in Asia, how it impacted him, and how he hoped the Corinthians would be able to help in it. Ultimately he is giving thanks to God for delivering him from the trouble.

1. Detail of the Trial, v. 8**Extreme Difficulty.**

Location – Asia, probably either in Ephesus or Troas or somewhere along the way between these two cities.

Nature of the trial – It seems to be a recent trial. It could have been the Ephesus riot of Acts 19 or some other persecution. These are hardships and not the thorn-in-the-flesh problem that Paul also suffered, since the Corinthians could share in them also (2 Cor. 1:6, 7). While Paul did not want the Corinthians to be uninformed about the trial, we are still somewhat in the dark about the specific details. Perhaps Titus, when he delivered the letter, could give them more information about what exactly happened.

Nevertheless, we know enough of the situation to gain a lot of profit from it. The extent of the trial is given in three phrases.

- A. Excessively burdened. Here the idea is that to an extraordinary degree they were pressed down as if with a weight. It's like the pain scale from 1 to 10, where Paul was at an 11 or 12!
- B. Beyond ability to cope. Paul realized that the situation was beyond his control. Often we have trouble admitting that ourselves, but some trials make it abundantly clear that we are *not* in control.
- C. Despaired of life. The persecution got to the point that Paul thought he was a “goner.” He was as good as dead. It seemed inevitable to Paul at the time he was enduring the persecution that he was at death's door.

There are other phrases in the following verses which tell us that this “despairing of life” is also called a “death sentence” and “so great a death.”

2. Purpose of the Trial, v. 9a**To Trust in God!**

At this point, we suspect that Paul escaped the trial, but even in the midst of it, without knowing the outcome, he could say that he understood God's overall design...so we look next at the purpose of it.

The “sentence of death” could be an official judgment passed against Paul by a governing authority that he was under the death sentence, or some feeling that Paul got from the onerous trial he had just gone through. The “we had” is in the perfect tense and indicates that the death sentence might still be “on his head.”

The point of the trial is that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God. If you don't get anything else out of this message, get this point.

- A. Do not trust in yourself. Paul said that his severe trials taught this. The point is not to trust less in ourselves and more in God, although we might look at it that way through the lens of progressive sanctification whereby we are conformed degree by degree into the image of Christ. But really the point is to NOT trust in ourselves AT ALL! In fact, in the perfect tense (“we should not set our trust in ourselves, nor should we continue in that kind of attitude”) the point is that self-trust should be totally abandoned. You could easily say self-trust is a form of idolatry!

B. Trust in God. Here is the flip side of the equation. What we are talking about here is reliance, commitment, and confidence. It is not the “believe this fact” kind of thing. It is a willing and informed acceptance of God and reliance upon Him. Note an OT example: In Ruth 2:12, Boaz commends Ruth for her coming to the LORD God of Israel to trust (find refuge) in Him.

Such trust has great “benefits” to it. In 2 Sam. 22:31 (cf. Psalm 18:30) it says that those who trust in the Lord will find that He is a shield to them. Other Psalms make a similar analogy with the refuge and fortress. 2 Kings 18-19 show how Hezekiah, with the help of Isaiah, trusted in God to deliver them from the siege of the Assyrians.

3. Deliverance from the Trial, v. 9b-10**Past, Present, and Future**

Here we learn that Paul did indeed escape the trial—at least this time! Though Paul felt that death was imminent, he experienced a resurrection-like event of God's power to deliver him from it. This sounds like the three men in the fiery furnace in Daniel 3.

- A. God, Who raises the dead. Here is a statement that is true whatever way you look at it—literally or figuratively. Literally speaking, God raised up Christ (Acts 2:32); he will raise us (1 Cor. 6:14), he raised up all the OT and NT folks who were resurrected (like the widow's son in 1 Kings 17 or Lazarus in John 11), and he will raise up the just and the unjust at their appropriate times in order to judge them. Figuratively speaking, he raised up Isaac (Heb. 11:19) and here Paul, as good as dead, was given a new lease on life by God Himself.
- B. God, Who delivered. Just a simple statement of what God did in the past for Paul in the Asian hardship.
- C. God, Who does deliver. God continues to deliver Paul from death. It is as if this thing hangs over his head (or other similar persecutions) and won't go away, but God continues to deliver.
- D. God, Who, we trust, will deliver. The word for trust is actually hope, but little difference can be detected between trust and hope here. The hope is a certain kind of thing, as usual with regard to Christian hope. Here is an expression of confidence that no matter how bad things get, our trust must be in God to make the way out. Paul expresses his confidence that when he faces similar trouble in the future, God will also deliver—at least he sets his hope in God in that way (note again the perfect tense, like in 2.A. above).

4. Prayer in the Trial, v. 11**For Deliverance, Leading to Thanksgiving**

The deliverance that Paul is trusting will occur does not come “automatically,” however. Prayer is a required element of it. He requests a couple things from the Corinthians:

- A. Pray for us. The point is that prayer “helps.” It is a God-ordained means to accomplish His purposes. Paul is asking for many people to pray.
- B. Thanksgiving for the outcome. Once the anticipated and hoped-for deliverance comes, then those many pray-ers should become thank-ers. This thanksgiving then accrues to the glory of God (see also 9:11-13, 4:15). It should be thanksgiving in all year round!

We are impotent; God is omnipotent. Prayer is one means that God uses to supply deliverance. Answer to that prayer causes people to give thanksgiving. Thanksgiving adds to God's glory.

Conclusions

Note how a trial can accomplish so much. It can cause us to depend totally on God; it can show us that we are unable ourselves and so we should not set our trust in ourselves; it provides opportunity for God to give us comfort, it points our hope to God (note Rom. 5:5), it gives us patience (James 1:2-3).

More verses on trusting the Lord.

Psalm 4:5, 7:1, 9:10, 18:2, 20:7, 31:1, 31:6, 34:22, 37:3, 37:5, 37:40, 40:3-4 (interesting how here praise to God leads to trust in others), 64:10, 71:1, 71:5, 73:28, 91:2, 115:9-11, 118:8-9, 125:1, 141:8, Prov. 3:5, 28:25 (fatness!), 29:25. The list goes on and on. There are literally dozens of verses in the Bible that expound the value of trusting in God alone.