

The God Of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-24

Key Verse: 1:3,4

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort....”

In today's passage Paul teaches us who God is through his personal experience. God is the God of all comfort. And God is faithful. Through this passage we learn what is the true source of comfort in our trials, and how to find it. We also learn what should be the foundation for our Christian life.

I. God Comforts Us (1-11)

Verses 1-2 are greetings. First, Paul said that he became an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. Then he, along with Timothy, greeted the church of God in Corinth together with all the saints throughout Achaia: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Look at verses 3-4. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." Right after giving a greeting, Paul praises God. Who is God whom Paul praised?

First, God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why did Paul say that God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? God is not only the God of Jesus Christ, but the Father of Jesus Christ. Their relationship is most intimate like that of a father and son. Those who call Jesus Christ "Lord" can share in this relationship. In John 20:17b Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "Go instead to my brothers and and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Through Jesus Christ we can call God our Father who is very near to us and who cares about us. Usually, in times of suffering people think God is far from them and not concerned about their practical problems. This is a wrong concept of God for those who call Jesus "Lord." God is our Father who is near us and who cares deeply about us.

Second, God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Paul uses two words to explain who God is: the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Compassion and comfort are closely related. Both begin with the prefix "com" which means "together," "with," or "jointly." God is with his people. God is

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with us in our passion, that is, in our times of suffering and struggle. God knows our thoughts, our pains and our sorrows, and God suffers together with us. Yet God does more than that. God is also with us to comfort us. Here, "comfort" does not mean to make comfortable by giving a soft reclining chair. It is to fortify us and to make us strong, strong enough to endure our sufferings and pains and to triumph over them.

God is the God of compassion and comfort as revealed in the Bible. In the time of Exodus, God's people were suffering as slaves under harsh Egyptian masters. They thought God did not care about them at all. But the Lord said to Moses in Exodus 3:7-8, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their sufferings. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...." God had indeed seen their misery. God had heard their cry. God was deeply concerned about their suffering. God was full of compassion and sent Moses to deliver them. Later, God revealed himself to Moses, saying in Exodus 34:6-7, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

God was so compassionate that he sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ into the world as our Savior. Though Jesus is God, he came down from heaven and lived among us. During his life on earth Jesus revealed God's compassion repeatedly. Once, Jesus met a man who was covered with leprosy. Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, "Be clean!" Immediately he was healed of leprosy. Jesus was full of compassion toward tax collectors. So he ate with them and drank with them to share fellowship and lead them to a new life. Jesus was full of compassion toward a Samaritan woman who was wounded by her sinful life. Jesus spoke to her kindly. Though she reacted with spite, Jesus embraced her and continued to speak kindly to her until she opened her heart to Jesus widely. Jesus was full of compassion toward a crowd of people who were like sheep without a shepherd. So he welcomed them and taught them the words of God. Then Jesus fed them all with five loaves and two fish. Finally, in his great compassion, Jesus took up our infirmities and sorrows and sins on the cross. And he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." In this way, God comforts us through Jesus.

It is very important for us to know that God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort in our practical lives. We face many small and big troubles

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while we are living on earth. Job said, "Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). To live in this world is a continuation of troubles. Since the Fall, man toils and sweats and labors to get three meals a day. People suffer from broken relationships with others. People suffer from disease, wars, floods, and earthquakes and so on. People suffer most from their sinful desires. When we meet all these troubles and sufferings, we need comfort. So people seek comfort in many ways. Some husbands want to be comforted by their wives. But the wives seek comfort from their husbands. When they cannot find comfort, they find discomfort through verbal fencing. Many young people want to be comforted by their peers and the members of their community. Often, however, they are hurt instead. People seek someone who can understand them, recognize them, and support them unconditionally. However, human beings cannot really comfort other human beings. Even Mother Barry cannot fully comfort us. However, God is different. Only God can understand us completely and comfort us until we are fully comforted. God is the God of compassion and the source of all comfort. If we try to receive comfort from others we only feel miserable and empty. But when we come to God, God welcomes us and understands us deeply. The compassionate God comforts us. Then we are truly comforted and fully satisfied. Furthermore, we can comfort others who are in trouble. In this way we can grow to be spiritual giants.

There is a famous story of Dr. Coddington who worked in Korea as a missionary very sacrificially. One day his youngest son drowned while swimming. No one could comfort Dr. Coddington. But he went to God, who is the God of all comfort, and overcame his deep sorrow. At the funeral service he sang a hymn and praised God. Then he said, "There is no accident in God." He comforted those who attended the funeral service.

How then can we be comforted by God. It may sound rather vague, because God is invisible. However, we can come to God through his word, which he has given us. Psalm 119:50 says, "My comfort in my suffering is this: your promise preserves my life." When we have trouble, we must hold on to the word of God's promise. Then the word of God gives us true comfort and strength. The word of God gives us the grace of forgiveness and true peace, courage when we need courage, and wisdom when we need wisdom. It gives us true hope and leads us to the eternal kingdom of God.

In addition, we can receive true comfort when we pray sincerely. Hannah is a good example of that. Hannah could not bear children. So she was despised and humiliated unbearably by her rival Peninnah. Hannah cried and could not eat. So

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her husband comforted her saying, "Hannah, don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (1 Sa 1:8) What a nice husband. But even this could not give her true comfort. Hannah did not fight with her rival maliciously; she determined to come to God through prayer. She poured out her soul to the Lord. God heard, and she was truly comforted (1Sa 1:18-20). The Lord gave her a son, Samuel, who became the spiritual leader of Israel. Earlier this year, M. Little-Sarah Kim was in deep agony with her daughter Sarah Little. At that time, she went to God in prayer with tears. God comforted her by working in Sarah Little and helping her to accept the word of God. Though Sarah Little could choose from many universities, she decided to attend UIC in order to serve God better. When M. John Peace went to Ukraine, he had the joy of God's calling. At first, his children did not share this. They wondered why they had to leave all of their friends and go to a strange land. They were ridiculed in school because they said they were Americans, but they looked Filipino. As parents, M. John and Maria felt deep pain. But they did not come back to the USA; they went to God in prayer. Then God comforted them. God worked in their children's hearts. Maria Joy was so moved by God's love that she decided to go to a Muslim country, Turkey, as a missionary. Later, another sister decided to go to a Muslim country, Kazakhstan, as a missionary. God comforts those who come to him in prayer. God uses them preciously in his redemptive work and history. So in times of trouble let's have fellowship with God deeply through prayer.

Paul goes on to say in verse 5 that when we share in the suffering of Christ, we can also share in the comfort that comes from Christ. In verses 6-7, Paul shares his own example. Paul was distressed over the Corinthians. Then God comforted him. This comfort overflowed to the Corinthinas. In verses 8-11 Paul teaches the meaning of suffering by sharing his suffering. Paul was a powerful and mature man of God. Still, he struggled with despair and fear. Verses 8-9 tell us he was under great pressure, far beyond his ability to endure. He despaired even of life. He felt the sentence of death in his heart. However, he sought God in his despair. He realized that trials came so that he might not rely on himself but on God who raises the dead. Through this he could have confidence in his heart. He could believe that God would continue to deliver him as he had delivered him from such a deadly peril. He could learn how to rely on God through this experience. When he relied on the Almighty God who raises the dead, he could have unwavering resurrection faith. God who raised Jesus from the dead is not just God of the past. He is the God of each one of us who is working with his power in our lives today. When we depend on God we can live a life of victory in any circumstances like Apostle Paul. In the time of suffering Paul valued the prayer support of his coworkers in Corinth (11).

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II. God is faithful (12-24)

In order to understand verses 12-24 we need to understand Paul's plan to visit Corinth and why he changed it. According to verses 15-16 his original plan was to leave Ephesus and go directly to Corinth on his way to Macedonia. On his return from Macedonia, he would visit Corinth again before going on to Judea with their help. But Paul changed his plan. Instead of visiting Corinth twice he visited Corinth only once and then returned to Ephesus. Later, he went to Macedonia, without visiting Corinth. Some of them began to criticize Paul as an unreliable man who did not keep his word. They began to doubt Paul's integrity, and even his apostleship. This could erode their confidence in the gospel message. For the sake of their faith, Paul defended his integrity by explaining why he changed his plan. In doing so, Paul shares some of his principles as a gospel worker.

First, he conducted himself in the holiness and sincerity that are from God (12-14). Verse 12 says, "Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God." This is the wisdom of God. Paul behaved according to God's wisdom rather than worldly wisdom. Paul could have conducted himself with worldly wisdom because Corinth was full of worldly wisdom and Greek philosophy. But Paul resolved to know nothing while he was with them except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1Co 2:2). Paul delivered the pure message of the cross. Then God worked graciously among them. Paul served the Corinthians-not based on worldly wisdom, but on the wisdom from God, which is God's grace. Worldly wisdom boasts of one's flesh and makes people proud. God's grace boasts about Jesus Christ. It reveals God's glory and makes men humble.

There are many ways to live in the world. Many people live according to their wisdom. They will fall into their own trap. However, when we live according to God's wisdom, we will become victors through God's help. So we must conduct ourselves in the holiness and in the sincerity that are from God. That is the way of true victory.

Second, Paul worked on the basis of God's faithfulness (18-20). At first Paul was confident to visit Corinth. He believed that his plan to visit them would benefit them twice. However he changed his plan. Did this mean he made his original plan lightly? Or did he make his plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath he could say, "Yes, yes," and "No, no." Not at all. When he planned his first visit he must have prayed a lot. However, as events unfolded, the Holy Spirit guided him

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another way. So he obeyed God's direction. He followed God's will on the basis of God's faithfulness. Look at verse 18. "But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.'" Because he believed in God's faithfulness, he was faithful in all he did. Furthermore, Jesus Christ whom Paul preached is faithful. Verse 19 says, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ...was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.'" Jesus followed God's time schedule. Jesus always did what pleased God. Jesus always said, "Yes," to God. Even at the time of his Gethsemane prayer, Jesus said, "Not my will, but yours be done." It was because Jesus fully trusted God and obeyed God absolutely. Jesus obeyed God to death, even death on a cross (Php 2:8). In this way all of God's promises were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God's faithfulness has been proven through Jesus Christ. Since God is always faithful, we can say "Amen," to the word of God's promises and give glory to God.

Third, Paul followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit (21-24). In verse 21, Paul reminded them that it is God who made both Paul and the Corinthians stand firm. God set his seal of ownership on them and put his Spirit in their hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what was to come. Since they had the Holy Spirit in their hearts, they should follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. When Paul continued to pray about his visiting plan, he came to know the guidance of the Holy Spirit better. So he could change his plan to visit them. In verses 23-24 Paul explained that it was to spare them. It was for the good of the Corinthian church, not to lord it over their faith, but for their joy.

Here we learn that the foundation of Christian fellowship is God's faithfulness. When we realize that God who is working among us is faithful, we can trust each other based on God's faithfulness. However, when we do not trust in God, we cannot trust each other. On our coins and currency, we find the words "In God we trust." However, according to a recent poll conducted by the Atlantic Monthly, trust is declining. Those who trust others included 55% of Americans in 1960. In 2003, it was just over 30%. When we do not trust God, we cannot trust our neighbors. When we trust in God who is faithful, we can trust each other in God and also build a society of trust.

In today's passage we learn that God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Also, God is faithful. God is always the same, yesterday and today and forever. So when we are in trouble and need comfort, let's come to God. When we come to God as we are, God welcomes us, understands us deeply and comforts us. When we find true comfort, we can be a source of comfort to others.