

“God of All Comfort”

by Bryan Gibson

What do you do when you're like Paul—when you're filled with anxiety for the souls of others; when you're burdened beyond measure, almost to the point of death; when you're troubled on every side, persecuted, and struck down; when you suffer stripes and imprisonments, tumults and sleeplessness; when you're cold and naked, hungry and thirsty; when you're attacked by false brethren; when things are so bad that you have no rest in your spirit and anguish in your heart (2 Corinthians 1:8; 2:1-4, 12-13; 4:8-9; 6:4-5; 7:5; 11:23-28)?

That's enough to make anyone “lose heart”, but Paul didn't (2 Corinthians 4:1, 16). In fact, he offered this perspective on all his troubles: “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

So what was it that kept Paul going, kept him from losing heart? The same thing that keeps us all going—the comfort which God alone can provide. And did Paul ever receive it: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all **comfort**, who **comforts** us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to **comfort** those who are in any affliction, with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted** by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in **comfort** too. If we are afflicted, it is for your **comfort** and salvation; and if we are **comforted**, it is for your **comfort**, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our **comfort**” (2 Corinthians 1:3-7, ESV).

But exactly how did God comfort Paul? We may not know all the means God used, but we do know some, and they're revealed in the first seven chapters of this same epistle. Let's see how God did it, because it will help us understand how he comforts us, too.

By the coming of Titus, at just the right time. “Our bodies had no rest...we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (7:5-6). Wonder how many times we've had a faithful brother come at just the right time?

By the love and encouragement of brethren. When Titus came, he brought comforting words concerning the Corinthians—that they still had affection for Paul, but more importantly, that efforts to lead them to repentance had been successful (7:7-12). Their obedience was a great source of joy and comfort to Paul (7:13-16), not to mention the prayers they offered on his behalf (1:11). Sound familiar? Let's not grieve so long over the unfaithful (12:20-21) that we can't find comfort in the faithful.

By giving him the opportunity to preach the glorious gospel of Christ. “Therefore, since we have this ministry...we do not lose heart” (4:1). And what an opportunity preaching provides—to diffuse the “fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2:14), to reconcile men

to God through Jesus Christ (5:18-21), to transform people into the image of Christ” (3:18), and to give them the hope of one day being “present with the Lord” (5:8). How comforting it is to know that whatever we suffer for preaching the gospel is absolutely worth it (1:6; 4:11-15; 6:10).

By teaching him the love of Christ. “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). If the love of Christ and the purpose it gives our life can’t keep us going, we’ve got a serious heart problem.

By offering him the hope of eternal life. “Therefore we do not lose heart...for our **light** affliction, which is but for **a moment**, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). That’s what suffering looks like—“light” and “but for a moment”—when you look through the lens of eternity.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).