

God of all Comfort

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[0 : 00] For we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. 2 Corinthians chapter 1, we read at verse 4. 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.

We see in these verses a summary, if you like, of the Christian life. How there is both comfort, consolation, strengthening on the one hand, but also affliction in the other hand.

The Christian life is never going to be an easy walk in the sunshine. That's for heaven. That's for glory. That day will come. But in this fallen earth, it's never going to be like that.

Because this is a fallen world and we are fallen creatures. We are going to make mistakes. We are going to fail at times. And apart from our own fallible nature and our own failures, there is all the attacks of the evil one, which are not accidental, and are not just little cakes of providence.

They are the deliberate undermining attempts of the evil one. And all the minions that he uses, whether demons or men, to try and weaken our faith or to draw us away from the Lord.

[1 : 26] He doesn't care how he does it. He can do it by cooling indifference and just drifting away. He can do it by the severity and viciousness of the attacks of men or the evil one, by hurtful words, by our own failures and our sense of despair.

He doesn't mind what he uses. He doesn't mind how people go to hell. He doesn't mind whether it's through not hearing the gospel in the first place or having heard it just to sort of drift away or having just lost our faith in some crisis or catastrophe.

He doesn't mind just as long as people are separated from Christ. The affliction that attends upon the Christian life is a reality. And this is what Paul is talking about.

But in the midst of that affliction, there is this critical, classical word comfort here. And if you notice in these verses 3 to 7 here, you may notice that in the verse in front of us, the ASV, the word comfort or comforted or some derivative of the word comfort is used about 10 times.

Now 10 times in 5, 6 verses, that's quite a lot. In the original, I think in the original Greek, it would be 9 times. In the old authorised verse, it's something like 7 times because it intersperses the word consolation with comfort.

[2 : 47] But it means pretty much the same thing. Comfort or confort, as it was in its old word, means literally joint strength.

If you comfort somebody, you share strength with them. And strength, loudness, I mean, those of you who are of a musical disposition, perhaps, you'll want the proper word for the instrument, the piano.

The proper term for it is the piano forti. And the reason for that is not because of the keys that you play, the black and white keys and so on. It's to do with the pedals. Because if you press one pedal, you make it loud.

You get forti. And if you press the other one, it dulls it down, makes it quieter. You get piano. So you get piano and forti. You get loud and soft with the same instrument.

That's why its proper name is piano forti. We tend to just shorten it to piano nowadays. But forti, strength, loudness, it's all the same derivative. Strength of sound, strength of bearing, courage under difficulties.

[3 : 50] If we comfort somebody, confort, it is joint strength. We share strength with them. We uphold them with the comfort that we have to give.

But we can't do anything if we ourselves don't have some strength to give. If two people are in a car crash and they're both completely incapacitated by their injuries, then they may both be in desperate need of help.

But the one cannot help the other because they are both completely incapacitated by their injuries. It needs the paramedics or the ambulance men and women to come and help them and bind up their breakages and stop the bleeding and do whatever is needed.

So this is why when Paul says about comfort is us in 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. He doesn't just mean, we are such good people. We've got such fine, upstanding, moral character. Of course we have strength to give to these poor, suffering souls. We can pat them on the shoulder and say, there, there, you'll feel better in the morning.

[5 : 00] No, he's not saying that. He says, we ourselves have received comfort, that is, joint strength, from God. We know what it's like to be in affliction. We know what it is like to suffer.

And we have received strength from God. And because we have received it from God, we are in a position to share it and to pass it on.

We cannot do that unless we have first received it from the Lord. Just like we were doing with the children. You cannot pass on a jelly sweetie to the next child if you haven't first had the bucket passed on to you.

You cannot pass on to them that which you have not received. But having received it, you can take yourself and then pass it on. If you choose not to take it, then instantly, I would guess, it's going to make the next little child think, why doesn't he or she want one?

These must be really yucky sweeties. I don't want one. I'm just going to pass it on and not take one. But if they see that you've taken it and you like it and you enjoy it and you pass it on, they'll want one and they pass it on and so on.

[6 : 07] So likewise, if people see in us that the gospel, the strength, the power of Christ has been received, has been a blessing, a sweetening, a strengthening to our lives, then we are equipped to comfort, to give joint strength to those who are likewise in affliction.

And friends, there is always going to be times of affliction in this world and in this life. And maybe you look around at some other people, you think, well, they don't have much affliction.

They don't have much suffering like I do. Their life is pretty much together. They've got it all sorted. I wish I had their life. I wish I was as well off and as altogether as them. They don't seem to have problems.

They don't have difficulties in their families. They don't have financial problems. They don't have the boss worrying them and worries about their job and all and so on. You don't know what is in their life. You don't know what individual burdens they are carrying.

How much wounding there is in their heart that is kept secret. You don't know their past. You don't know the details of their lives. I guarantee you, because they are in this world, they will have afflictions and they will have sufferings.

[7 : 21] And those may be sufferings which they are able perhaps to bear because they have the grace of Christ. Or that may be something that the Lord has placed you in a position to give to and to share with somebody else.

But they will need that comfort at some stage, at some point in their lives. And it may be that for all that they may seem to have, all the blessings and benefits of the material world, they are spiritually barren and dark and empty inside and cannot see a reason to go on living.

There won't be a single one of us who hasn't at some point questioned, what is the purpose of life? For those who are in Christ, they don't need to ponder too long on that question.

They know that life has its meaning, its fulfillment, its purpose in Christ. Our purpose here is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

And a part of our purpose is to share that glory and joy with others that they too might be gathered to Him. This world is a preparation time, a training ground for the eternal reality, which is the ultimate goal for which we are all brought into this world.

[8 : 40] And that will be an eternity either with Christ in glory or without Him. But there's no comfort without Him. There's no comfort without Him in this world. And there's no comfort without Him in eternity either.

You ever wonder why it is that so much of what this world counts as enjoyment and fun and laughter and so on is all about blotting out the reality of the world.

People tell them, oh, having a great party, having a great time and so on. What do they mean? They usually mean a free flow of drink and getting as much in as you possibly can of it so that

what?

So that you blot out the reality of the world. That's what it amounts to. So much of what people call a good time here is blotting out the world.

And a party is all about drink and about noise and about loud music and so on so that you don't have to think. So that you can't focus, you can't concentrate. Reality is pushed to the boundaries for a while.

[9 : 44] That's their definition of a good time. That's their definition of enjoyment, of happiness. Is the world being pushed away for a while?

Just blot it out of my mind. Just don't let me have to listen to it. Just fill it with noise, with loud music or whatever, or with constant attention to screens in daily life so I don't have to stop and think and look around me and think, what is it all for?

Why is it happening this way? We are given the comfort, the strength, that the Lord alone can provide so that we can pass it on to others who comforts us in 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.

The affliction is a given. But the comfort is given by God. It is that which He gives in order to strengthen us. Now, strengthenings, I'm sure I've mentioned in the past, if you think about physical strengthening and, you know, everything in this physical world, everything in creation and in our lives and in our bodies as well, it all points us to our spiritual fulfillment in Christ.

You look at the complexity, the intense sophistication and complexity of the human body and how it is designed and the perfection and balance of it all.

[11 : 10] And you can preach a hundred sermons just on the biology and the miracle of what God has done. But suffice to say that if we were to build up our bodies in strength and in stamina, it would only be by exerting of it.

Now, what you do when you build your muscles, when you go to a gym or when you're weightlifting, is you are tearing the muscle tissue. You tear the muscle tissue by putting a strain on it.

And then the body repairs itself by putting another little layer of muscle tissue over the scar. And that then gets harder to protect it. So it's building up on top of the scarring of the tissue inside.

When you put your body, your muscle system under strain, you're building it up because it is being torn and repaired and torn and repaired.

And so the muscle builds up. Likewise with stamina, you're pecking and panting. So you take a brisk walk, oh, you're out of breath. But then next time, maybe you jog a little and you build up a little more stamina.

[12 : 14] The more you exercise it, the more it is used. But if you had the choice, would you rather stay in bed and roll over and go back to sleep? Or would you rather get up at six in the morning and go for your run or go to the gym?

It's a bit of a no-brainer. We'd rather just roll over and go back to sleep. But what sort of condition will our bodies be in if we do that? Likewise, it's far easier just to sit on the couch and watch TV rather than to exercise the body.

But the body that is exercised and put under strain is in far better condition than the one that isn't. And likewise with our souls. If our soul is exercised and put under strain, yes, there will be scarring. Yes, there will be wounded. But the soul is enabled to repair, not the way the body does from within itself. Our souls don't repair and strengthen themselves within themselves.

We've got nothing in ourselves. It is from the comfort, the strength that Christ gives that our soul is able to be repaired. An athlete gets fit by putting his or her body under strain and pushing it to the limits.

[13 : 25] And it's from the limits for endurance and ultimately for glory. For what? For a gold medal that is awarded at games once every four years. Or for the knowledge that for a while you were the fastest person or the strongest person to do some great achievement.

Until the next person comes along and breaks your record. And somebody always will. Anything in this world is temporary. Any sporting achievement, any academic achievement, any military achievement is temporary.

Because this world is temporary. It's passing away. So the question is not, how great can I be in this brief moment of time that I've got for my life? It's, how can you make it count?

How can you make what you do in this world last? Not only for time, but for eternity. And what you do in this world, the most important thing you can do in this world is secure your salvation in Christ. Not simply so you can sit back in your hands and say, oh, it's me safe now. I can just warm my hands at the fire of salvation and take things easy. No, you are comforted in the midst of your affliction.

[14 : 34] Not simply so that you yourself may be secure in salvation, but so you can comfort others because they don't know perhaps the God and the Savior who has comforted you.

If we are to face the trials of this world, then we cannot do it in and of ourselves. We can fool ourselves. Oh, I get through under my own strength.

It's just self-help and concentrate and just focus the mind and that'll get you through. And that's great for people that are able to do it and to pat themselves on the back and say, I did it my way. But at the end of the day, where is your way going to lead if it's just you? Where is it going to take you? Where is that road going to lead you eternally if I did it my way?

The only way that it's going to redeem and save is to do it God's way because that way it will last. That way it will bless. That way it will be a means of blessing not only to us, but also to others.

[15 : 36] It will be a strengthening. It will make a difference not only in your life, but in the lives of those whom you touch. You see, our calling in this world is not simply to try and avoid suffering.

You're not going to succeed in avoiding suffering. Somebody would say, well, I wish you long life and happiness. That's great. You'll have happiness for a while, but it is a mathematical certainty, obvious.

The longer you live, the more bereavements you are going to experience. If you have long life and good health, it doesn't follow that everybody around you will have equally good health or equally long life.

You're going to go to an awful lot more funerals as the years pass because your life is prolonged. We don't have a choice in that matter, but the Lord gives us the strength having come through and in going through these afflictions and trials to be able to give them meaning and purpose.

With the Lord, nothing is lost. Nothing is for nothing. Every tear is bottled. Every sigh is recorded. Every affliction has a purpose.

[16 : 53] We are able to pass on to others that comfort, that blessing which we ourselves have experienced. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort, verse 6, and salvation.

If we are comforted, it is for your comfort which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffered. In other words, if you see us afflicted, it is for your benefit so that we bear something that you might not have to.

We can help share the Lord. And if you see us comforted, Paul is saying, it means that you can see that even in the midst of your affliction, that comfort will come. God will not leave you comfortless. Remember, Jesus says that in John 14. I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you. Now, the original translation of that is I will not leave you as orphans.

I won't leave you like a little children without parents to look after them. Jesus said, when you pray, say, Our Father, He won't leave us as orphans. He will come to us. He will strengthen.

[17 : 54] He will help us if we ask. Jesus never turns anyone away. Jesus never refuses anyone. It doesn't matter what their situation is.

It doesn't matter how many times they may have denied Him, how many times did Peter deny Jesus? How many times have we denied Jesus effectively in our lives, if not overtly with our speech, certainly in the way that we have lived and in what we have done or what we have failed to do?

How many times have we let Him down? But our dependency is in a God who keeps no score of wrongs. That's one modern understanding of the translation of 1 Corinthians 13.

Charity suffereth wrong and is kind. Charity envieth not. Charity wanteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. It doesn't keep a score of wrongs.

[19 : 03] It endures everything. God doesn't keep a score of wrongs to those who come to Him. It is said, and I know it's an apocryphal story, it's not a real story, it's said that when somebody came to the Lord and he said, what about all my sins?

What about all the things that I've done, Lord? How can I possibly atone it? Tell me, tell me now all the sins that I've got to repent of. That the Lord answered and said, I've forgotten.

Now of course the Lord's memory is perfect, but in the sense that our sin is washed away, plunged, as it implies in Micah chapter 7, into the sea of that divine forgetfulness.

The Lord chooses not to remember. Chooses not to count against us. It is as though we went with our few pathetic pence to a creditor to whom we owed hundreds of pounds.

And he said, the debt is expunged. It is gone. It is wiped clean. It is forgotten about. It doesn't mean that he does not remember that we in fact owe him money.

[20 : 11] It means that it is gone. It is as though paid. He has borne the cost himself. And that is what it is like with the Lord. He seeks to comfort us that we may comfort those who are themselves in need of comfort.

Paul is not writing any of this to glorify himself. Notice what he says there in verse 3. 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 a comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

This is that which we must have. Receive it. Not in order simply to hog it or to hold it simply for ourselves, but rather that it may be passed on.

It may be passed on having been received and utilized for our good that others can see in our lives this actually works. This actually makes a difference and I'll tell you this is the only thing that ultimately works.

This is the only thing with no negative side effects except of course that the devil doesn't like it and that the devil will try to attack you for it and there will be affliction from outside because of it and anxieties with it but there's no negative side effects in real terms to this particular medicine.

[21 : 46] this is that which heals. This is that which restores. This is that which comforts. But if you're going to administer that comfort you must first receive it.

Who wouldn't want to receive it? Who wouldn't want to be comforted in the midst of affliction? Who wouldn't want this grace and salvation that only the Lord can give?

Well there may be two perhaps reasons. One is I don't want to be dependent anymore. I don't want to have to be said that I'm leaning on a crutch and not making my own way through life and that is the voice of the strong.

That is the voice of the one who says I am going to be strong my way. That's fine for you but what comfort can you give if that were true? What comfort can you give to those who have not so much as a crutch to lean on?

Those who have perhaps the spiritual equipment of no arms and legs. Those who are perhaps helpless infants. Those who are perhaps broken in their lives or ruined by the memory of their own sin.

[22 : 54] What comfort can you the strong and untroubled give to those who are themselves in the midst of weakness and the dirt and despair of their own sins?

Hebrews tells us this in chapter 2 and verse 18 because he himself that is Christ has suffered when tempted he is able to help those who are being tempted.

He himself has been through that which we ourselves go through. He knows what it is to be tempted. He knows what it is to deal with those who are themselves failures because he got down where we are.

This is not simply some distant religion of follow this good man's example. Try to be like him and at the end of the day hope that God will be merciful to you because of all your failures.

God is not one to burn the ropes or to turn a blind eye or to just shrug and pretend it doesn't matter. Sin does matter. Sin matters every time it happens.

[23 : 59] Sin in your life matters. Sin in my life matters. One sin is enough to send you or me to a lost eternity. If it were possible for you to go through your entire life sinless and without fault and yet one day in the midst of your life you made one mistake committed one sin and that was the only thing you had to confess before God at the end of the day.

Could he still send you to hell? Absolutely. Yes. He could and he would be right to do so. If you were setting out a placemat or setting a table for the queen to come and dine at your table and all the knives and forks and the cup that he would have and all the napkins were there and somebody was setting out all the queen white napkins and there was one splodge of dirt or of ink or of blood or

whatever it was on one napkin.

Would you say it's okay it's not that bad it's only one little spot no you need it pristine you need it absolutely spotless and clean and likewise for the king likewise for the lord of glory it will not do that a life that is besmirched with sin to come into his presence how could heaven be perfect if sin could dwell there how could heaven be pure if even one sin could be admitted into the presence of the holy and living God it will not be your sin and mine it must be paid for and your life and mine will not cut it it has to be Christ but that perfect life has been lived that perfect sacrifice has been made that comfort is freely offered the proud soul says I don't need a clutch to lean on that's great you can go running and jumping and hardling your athletic way all the way to a lost eternity because if you can't see the sin and trouble that is in your life then you are by definition blind and boy that's quite a handicap it's no great comfort to say in the midst of outer darkness and a lost eternity hey

I did it my way this is great our way will always lose us Christ's way will always save us but that way that we receive from him is not simply for us it is to light the way also for others thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path but if you have a light if you've got the light along the road at Port Laguna if you've got the lighthouse it's not just so that people in the village can be oh there's that light it blinks on and off it turns around isn't that nice that lights us for a couple of seconds in our homes and in the roads and in the streets of Port Laguna and Port Waller and so on for a couple of seconds all through the night it's not just for the locality where the lighthouse is placed it's so that miles out to sea and when there is danger of rocks and when people are trying to navigate that light is there for them to navigate by and those who are blessed by it and those who are helped by it may or may not ever actually visit the site of that lighthouse they may never come to Port Laguna they may never be there at that end of the peninsula but they will have benefited from it now somebody who benefits from the witness of

Christ in your life some word that you said some little help that you offered you and they may pass like ships in the night and they may never see you again and they may never know what your name was and you may never know the benefit or the blessing that you were to them but you will have helped them and comforted them and been a light to them nevertheless because it's not about your glory or the bumping up of your name or your testimony or your CV it is all about Christ and when it is about Christ we ourselves are comforted with that joint strength which he is able to give us and which having received we are able to share and having shared it just keeps growing and increasing you think well how can that be I mean surely if you give something of something then there's less of it well I could cite the example of the feeding of the five thousand you know five loaves and two fishes and the more they broke and the more they shared the more there was then yeah okay fair enough but you know that's like a miracle that doesn't happen with us nowadays leave aside the fact that what we're talking about is the bread of life it's what

[29 : 03] Christ does let's think of an earthly example we've been talking about light we've been talking about shining away in the path if you light a candle and there's that little flame there on that candle you can take a hundred candles and bring them to that flame and take an equal flame away from it a hundred times over and the flame of that first candle will not be diminished rather it will be increased it will be increased as each successive candle is placed in its place it may increase a hundred fold without diminishing the flame of that first little candle you will not be reduced or impoverished by giving away that which Christ has first given to you you will not be reduced or made more poor or mean by sharing that which the Lord has shared first of all with you this is what Paul is talking about who comforts us in all our affliction and that affliction you know to be a reality so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction and they are always going to be in affliction one way or the other with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God leave God out of the picture and none of the pieces make sense it's like trying to do a jigsaw round the wrong way when there's no colors no pictures no pattern it's all just grey cardboard turn it over look at the picture find where the pieces go and you'll see not only does everything fit together and oh look it makes a nice picture not only that but it was designed to be so it was intended to produce that picture it was intended that every single piece would have every single right place and would in due course be found and would in due course be fitted in with those round about it to make the picture at the end of the day friends your place and mine may seem very insignificant a tiny little piece of the jigsaw a single thread in the tapestry a solitary paint stroke of the brush but nevertheless the Lord intends in and through sinners like us to create a work of art of which we are invited to be part but of which we are not the ultimate glory the ultimate glory is of God and not of us and can there be anything greater than to be part of the glory of God to which he invites us and to

which he calls us and to which he calls sinners who as yet may never have heard of him but who might just hear or see or witness something of that glory something of that comfort something of that help through the midst of affliction through you and the affliction that you for all I know may be going through now if God will comfort and uphold you through it this 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 may the

Lord bless to us these few thoughts and let us pray