Divine Comfort

(Encouragement for Weary Saints)

2 Corinthians 7:4b-7

7/24/2011

Introduction:

If great spiritual leaders like Paul needed God's comfort in times of distress, how much more do we?

To what extent does God bring comfort? How does He bring His comfort to His children?

I. God comforts His children even in the <u>midst of tribulation</u> by <u>His uplifting power</u> (v.4b-5)

II. God comforts His children through the <u>presence</u> and <u>fellowship</u> of <u>fellow-believers</u> (v.6)

III. God comforts His children through the <u>good report</u> of <u>people</u> we <u>are concerned about</u> (v.7)

It is encouraging to see other believers have…

A. A <u>longing desire</u> to make things right

B. A <u>mournful repentance</u> of sin and the breach it caused

C. A <u>zealous attitude</u> to reestablish broken relationships

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Introduction:

"There are few things in life more painful than broken relationships. Shattered marriages, wayward children, and disrupted friendships. Shattered marriages, wayward children, and disrupted friendships produce intense sufferings and deep sorrow. When those broken relationships involve fellow believers, the pain is even more severe. Watching believers suffer consequences of their sinful conduct compounds the grief from the breaking of the relationship.
"Though richly rewarding in many ways, the ministry is arduous. To properly interpret the Word of god, understand theology, edify believers, and refute those in error requires diligent, hard labor. Proving to be an example to the flock, developing and training leaders, admonishing the unruly, encouraging the fainthearted, and healing the weak (1 Thes. 5:14) all take their toll. But the most painful aspect of ministry involves difficult relationships between the sheep and the shepherds. All pastors know the hurt that comes when those in whom they have invested the most return the least.
"As he penned this epistle, Paul nursed a broken heart over the church he loved and served. He was under severe external pressure, experiencing afflictions (1:4, 6, 8) and suffering (1:5, 7) to the point that he "despaired even of life" (1:8), "had the sentence of death within himself]" (1:9), and needed to be "delivered . . . from so great a peril of death" (1:10). In 4:8-12 he described himself as:

> 'afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also maybe e manifested in our body. For we how live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also maybe e manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you'." (MacArthur, p. 260)

"Not only was the apostle sprinkled with fears (v. 5), he was drenched with depression. All of us get depressed from time to time. Some depressions hover over us like a lingering cloud. Other types are more transitory, varying in degree and duration. Many Christians deny their depression. They may feel that if they aren't positive and sunny all the time, they are letting Christ down. But by denying their depression, they deny reality. Just as every day isn't filled with sunshine, so our lives aren't continually filled with the radiance of Christ. We have to face the facts of darkness, long shadows, and rainy days in our lives." (Swindoll, p. 107).

v. 4

The word **"comfort"** (which occurs repeatedly in this context) is from the Greek word *parakaleo*, which literally means "to call along side." God comes alongside us in the person of the Holy Spirit Himself, and brings needed encouragement and consolation.

If great spiritual leaders like Paul needed God's comfort in times of distress, how much more do we?

To what extent does God bring comfort? How does He bring His comfort to His children?

I. God comforts His children even in the <u>midst of tribulation</u> by <u>His uplifting power</u> (v.4b-5)

v. 4

"Filled with comfort" - when God comforts, He fills it up to the top with comfort. There is no shortage of comfort with God. Despite the hardships and turmoil Paul faced, he was filled with God's comfort and overflowing with God's joy.

v. 5

"When we were come into Macedonia" - Here Paul resumes his earlier discussion on how he was very worried about how he missed a planned meeting with Titus and then proceeded on to Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 2:12-13 (KJV)

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

Paul had received a God-sent Macedonian call to "cover over into Macedonia and help us." And even though God sent Paul there, and even though Paul would be very faithful there (2 Cor. 2:14-16), he would also experience intense tribulation there (cp. 2 Cor. 4:8-11, 11:24-28).

Is it ever part of God's plan that we suffer? Ironically, yes!

Some of God's greatest work has been accomplished by saints who underwent suffering. Such endurance brings glory to God.

"Our flesh had no rest" - Paul faced non-stop, relentless, physical persecution when he first entered Macedonia. He was harassed at every turn. His flesh (body) probably was "worn down to the bone" at times.

"Troubled on every side" - at every turn, every transition, at each new ministry opportunity, he faced affliction/tribulation.

Have you ever had those seasons of life when it seemed that everything was going wrong?

"Without were fightings" – from outside external sources, there came disputes and conflicts.

And from **"within were fears"** – these fears were concerns and worries that weighed heavy on Paul's heart.

But in the midst of these gigantic burdens came the comforting hand of God.

God specializes in coming to the rescue. Superior to any super-hero, such as Superman, Spiderman, or "Underdog" who always seem to arrive just in the nick of time (and really these shows are cheap substitutes for a work only God can do) – God comes just when needed. When we in faith call out for Him, He shows up with immediate relief.

v. 6

"God. . . comforteth those that are cast down" – the cast down ones are those who have been crushed into a lowly, humble, potentially discouraging situation. He comes and lifts them up. He gives grace to the humble.

God's comfort is not the experience of the proud and lofty, but of the humble and lowly. In this sense those of humble circumstances, status, and resources are more mighty than those who sense no danger or need. Those who are "cast down" have the privilege of experiencing a power most others know nothing of.

Can you think of people in "cast down," humble situation who experienced God's comfort? What about . . .

--Abraham
--Joseph
--David
--Jeremiah
--Job
Etc.

John 14:16-18
And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

In suffering, we don't need an alcoholic drink of "southern comfort" (whiskey); we need a heavenly dose of divine, spiritual comfort. (Note: In suffering, people often turn to substances—such as alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes or things as cheap substitutes for the answer found in God!)

II. God comforts His children through the <u>presence</u> and <u>fellowship</u> of <u>fellow-believers</u> (v.6)

"How would you comfort Paul? Send him a tract? Remind him of theological realities? Probably not. After all, he wrote the realities.
"Titus's coming – the divine antidote to Paul's depression was this: "But god, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (v. 6). Without warning, Titus showed up! What a rush came over Paul. Titus was alive and safe. They joyously embraced. 'Titus, what a sight you are for these weary old eyes! Why didn't you show up in Troas? Well, no matter, you're here!" Paul's spirits began to lift. Even if Titus would deliver a bad report, Paul's joy welled." (Hughes, p. 149).

Paul, who was very concerned over his missed engagement with Titus at Troas, had no rest in his spirit on that occasion (2 Cor. 2:13). But he was now filled with joy upon the arrival of his dear friend and comrade.

"By the coming of Titus" - Just the very presence of Titus brought great comfort to Paul.

We often underestimate the importance of our presence in the life of someone else.

One reason why we gather each week and have many opportunities for fellowship is because we need it.

None of us will make it successfully without some "Titus" in our life.

God comforts us so that we can comfort others.
2 Cor. 1:4-5 - *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

III. God comforts His children through the <u>good report</u> of <u>people</u> we <u>are concerned about</u> (v.7)

"One of the great literary pieces that came out of the Vietnam War was a book called *Friendly Fire*. It detailed the events surrounding the death of a soldier and the failure of the defense department to account for what had actually happened. Only after the dead soldier's persistent parents demanded disclosure did it become clear that the young man had not lost his life to the enemy but to misdirected artillery fire from American guns. Friendly fire, it was called. "Friendly fire is not unusual among Christian leaders. The wounds incurred in spiritual battle come, unfortunately, all too often from friendly guns. When we fire those guns at our fellow soldiers or receive fire from them, spiritual passion is often destroyed. (Swindoll, quoting from MacDonald, p. 105-6)

"Titus's comfort – As wonderful as Paul's joy was at Titus's return, it was exceeded by the news of Titus having been comforted by the Corinthians due to their positive re-embrace of Paul: "and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more" (v. 7). The other-directedness of Paul's life shines here. Initially he was downcast not for himself but for the uncertain fate of Titus and the looming apostasy of the Corinthians. But now his joy surges at Titus's comfort at the Corinthian turnabout evidenced in their longing and mourning and zeal for Paul, so that he 'rejoiced still more.' Again Paul has emphasized that the source of all this comfort is god alone. And Paul has received it fully because he is so God-focused and other-person focused. The comfort and joy of Titus and the Corinthians effected the comfort of his other-directed soul." (Hughes, p. 150)

Paul had waited with great anticipation to hear the report of Titus about how the Corinthians had received his earlier letter of rebuke.

"By the consolation wherewith he was comforted" – encouragement is catching.

The Corinthians (by their humble response of repentance) encouraged Titus, and Titus passed on this news to Paul, and consequently Paul's heart was encouraged.

It is encouraging to see other believers have…

A. A longing desire to make things right

This **"earnest desire"** was a longing on the Corinthians heart to be reconciled to Paul. It was a desire to make things right with him.

B. A mournful repentance of sin and the breach it caused

"Your mourning" – this was a deep sorrow over their sin which brought them to a point of repentance (vv. 8-10).

Someone's repentance of sin will always bring encouragement to those who love God and His truth.

The sexual sin described in 1 Corinthians 5:1f was a grief to Paul, but their repentance was a great joy!

C. A zealous attitude to reestablish broken relationships

The Corinthians, who seemed to be a carnal bunch with little apparent respect for Paul's leadership (in 1 Corinthians), now showed great zeal to let him know how much they loved and respected him. It is obvious that they were zealous to now prove to Paul their desire to re-establish their closeness to him. And this desire brought great joy to Paul's heart.

The Corinthians were now very zealous to demonstrate that they would not follow the anti-Paul faction that existed at Corinth.