

**Acts 9: 31; “The Comfort of the Holy Spirit”, Sermon # 42 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
February 26th, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.**

How is it that a church grows with a growth which is from God? How is it that those in a local church can be so blessed that the results of their efforts and their numbers are multiplied? We are given the answer to these questions here in this verse. It comes by the working of the Holy Spirit. When He is pleased with what He sees going on in the lives of the membership of that church, then He grants the blessings of spiritual prosperity. This is something which I believe that we ought to strive to see taking place in our midst. For if each of us individually, and all of us corporately have a very real interactive relationship of fellowship with God the Father, and with our Lord Jesus by means of the working of the Holy Spirit, then I believe that we will see these blessings being bestowed upon us in greater measure. The question is – Are we walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit? This verse gives us 3 descriptions of what it means. 1st – To walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it means that the members of the church are experiencing peace. 2nd – To walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit means that the members of the church are being built up and edified. And 3rd – It means that the members of the church are walking in the fear of the Lord. May the Lord help us today to grasp how greatly beneficial it is for our church to know the comforts which the Holy Spirit alone can bring to us, so that we might be multiplied.

1st of all – To walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit means that the members of the church are experiencing peace.

It says here – “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace...” The King James translation says – “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria...” No doubt, in the first place, this means that the churches were experiencing an outward peace because Saul the great persecutor of the church had been converted, and was not ravaging them in that area any more. That was a great relief. But, the tables had been turned, we saw in my last message to you. Saul himself was now being persecuted for the faith, for it says in verse 29 that “he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.” And so, “when the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus”. The object of the Hellenist’s hatred now being moved to a different region of the country, those in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had outward peace. But I find it hard to believe that this is all that is meant by these words.

It is true that the members of these churches were experiencing a rest from persecutions because Saul was now converted to Christ, and because he was now out of the area. But we have to ask the question: Was he the only persecutor in that area? I do not think so. I am sure that there yet remained many Jews who were still filled with hate for Christians; men who were willing to try and persecute people in the churches of that area. They are not mentioned in relation to this verse. But no doubt they were still there, and they were still full of hatred toward Christians. So, if this rest that is mentioned here was primarily an outward rest and peace from persecution, it would not last very long. We must conclude, however, that this general, temporary, outward peace was, no doubt, conducive to give a certain amount of relief to the churches of this area. For we must remember that good truth which is found in 1st Timothy 2: 1 and 2 – “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” Having outward peace and not being persecuted is a great blessing and it is conducive to making progress in godliness.

But I believe that the peace that is mentioned in the verse that we are studying this morning was more than an outward peace. I believe that was an inward peace and rest from anxious thoughts which was granted to these churches and these believers in particular, according to the working of the Holy Spirit who was pleased with them and pleased to give it to them. I want you to turn with me over to John chapter 16, verses 24-33. "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father." "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father have come into the world." "Again, I leave the world and go to the Father." "His disciples said to Him, 'See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!'" "Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You." "by this we believe that You came forth from God." "Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe?'" "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone." "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace." "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Here we see that Jesus is preparing his disciples for His going away from them into heaven and they would see Him no more. He wanted them to know of His love for them and the Father's love for them. He wanted them to learn to pray for God's help in all the various difficult and dangerous situations that they would encounter while they were in the world, for in the world they would have tribulation. Tribulation, in the context of what Jesus is saying here, is that awful feeling of great distress because you are realizing the pain and the affliction of suffering for your identification with Christ, and your trying to live a righteous life in accordance with the truth of the Bible. Tribulation is that experience in a Christian's life when they realize that the unbelieving people in the world do not approve of their living their life to God and to Christ; living their life for truth and righteousness, and so they oppose the Christian who is doing that very thing. They make their life uncomfortable as they can. And the Devil helps them out in that evil work.

Tribulation sometimes also comes because we are living in a fallen world where sin has affected ourselves and every other person on the planet. Tribulation is going to be encountered, Jesus is saying, because you are living in a world where unbelieving people dislike Christians, and they dislike being told that they must be converted to Christ in order to find the meaning of life. They dislike being told that they must have grace from Christ to find real peace with God, and to experience the real peace of God. Jesus said that He spoke these things to His disciples, that "in Him you may have peace". He is saying you must not look for peace from the world; that is, worldly assurances of earthly peace. You must not expect to find peace in the strategies and counsels of the supposed wisdom of worldly people. You must look to Him for real peace. In Jesus you will have, by faith, a peace that is sure and effectual because the Holy Spirit can most really convey it to you. He can give peace right in the midst of your having a troubled mind.

How does He do this? Well, look with me over at John 14: 22-27. "Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, 'Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?'" "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.'" "He who does not love Me does not keep My words: and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you." "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your

remembrance all things that I said to you.” “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

You can see here that in verse 23 that Jesus answers this question from Judas, of how He would manifest Himself to his disciples and not to the world, by telling them that if anyone loves Christ, they will keep His word, and in turn the Father will love him. And then the Father and the Son would come and make their home with him. They would do this, by their sending the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, to indwell every believer; not just the apostles. Jesus who in His humanity would be physically present in heaven, then, but in His deity would be with the believer. The Father who fills all things, would also be present in the believer’s heart as God along with the Son, making their abode with the believer. But it would be the particular work of the Holy Spirit, having been “sent” by the Father and the Son, to engage in the particular work of causing every believer to understand better, experientially, the help and comfort of God. This is Christ manifesting Himself to the believer’s heart, by and through the working of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word in verse 26, which is translated “Helper” in the NKJV is Parakletos. (Παρακλητος), and it is translated “Comforter” in the King James Version. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to give help and comfort to the believer, in their understanding the Scriptures better, to realize the Advocacy of Christ in defending them from the charges of the Devil and the discouragements that he would attempt to bring the believer as they go about to live their life for God.

Further it is the work of the blessed Holy Spirit to give help and comfort to the persecuted and oppressed believer by means of giving peace to them as they are seeking to do the will of God, in every situation. “My peace I give unto you”, says Jesus, “not as the world gives, give I unto you.” “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”. And further yet, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to give comfort to the believer who is feeling a great sense of loneliness and a sense of feeling desolate because of great and repeated discouragements which they have had in regard to their making progress in righteousness and holiness. It is the Spirit’s particular business to teach you all things, dear believer, and bring to your remembrance all that Jesus has said to you in His word the Bible. The apostles had this remembrance given to them directly by the Spirit and this forms a part of the inspiration of the Bible. But you, dear believer, have the written word of God, the more sure word of prophecy to consult. And it will speak peace to your heart in connection with the working of the Holy Spirit giving you grace and peace.

Now 2nd – To walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit means that the members of the church are being built up and edified.

“The churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified.” That is, they were built up in their faith. They were encouraged and strengthened by the work of the Holy Spirit who was building their faith, and strengthening them in every grace He conveyed to them; and this, in accordance with the truth of the word of God being preached to them. The word “edified” (Oiko-do-mou-menai) οικοδομουμεναι, which we find here, is a figurative expression, and Joseph Benson, the commentator says that it is – “properly a term of architecture, signifying the erecting or constructing the whole superstructure of a building upon a foundation. In this place it must signify, by analogy, that the churches were further instructed in the great truths of the gospel, and advanced in all the branches of piety and virtue.” In other words, because the Holy Spirit was comforting them and helping them they were growing up into greater Christ-likeness. They were availing themselves of all of the means of grace which were given to them in attending the services of worship where the preaching of the word was primary, where prayers were being offered, where the ordinances of baptism and the Lord Supper were observed, and where real spiritual fellowship was taking place.

When your heart is in these means of grace, it means that you are walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Listen to Jude verse 20 – “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your

most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” You can see that building yourself up in your most holy faith is only done by praying in the Holy Spirit and by keeping yourself in the love of God. You can see from the way that it is worded that this building up is not automatic. We must take steps to keep ourselves in our most holy faith. We must be praying in the Holy Spirit. Realize just how great the truth is of Romans chapter 8, verses 26-28 – “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.” “For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” We must keep ourselves in the love of God. To keep yourself in the love of God, you must exercise your faith and remember the Father’s love for you; how He sent His only-begotten Son into the world so that you would not perish, but have everlasting life. You must remember that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn you, but that you through Him are saved. You must consciously remember that you, the one who has believed in Him, is not condemned, because you have believed in Jesus who died for your sins, and that He ever lives to make intercession for you.

You must truly believe that everything that God is doing in your life is perfect; His ordering of all the events of your life, His testing of your faith, and His showing you where you are spiritually weak. And you must believe with all of your heart, that He is working to build proven character into your life. James chapter 1, verse 2 – “My brethren, consider it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking in nothing.” In other words, don’t fight against His work. This is for your best. His giving you the preached word to build you up in the faith, means that He will be using it to edify you; to make you strong and joyful in having fellowship with Him in the midst of whatever sufferings or afflictions that you are going through. It is by this good means that you will be able to look outside of yourself to see how you can help others. The object of our building ourselves up in our most holy faith is so that we might be able to build other Christians up in theirs.

Turn to Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11-16. “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Now, you can see here that the giving of these teaching and preaching gifts to the Church was for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. All of them mentioned are no longer in existence as they were offices which were needed in the early church, and those in those offices had revelatory gifts which have ceased since that day. But the office of pastor-teacher continues in the church. And what I am called to, as your pastor-teacher, is to lay out the truth of the word of God to you in such a way that over time you will be equipped through what you are taught to do the work of service to Christ; so that your work of personal ministry and service to Him would be established and bear fruit to Him.

My work is to edify you, the body of Christ. It is to patiently teach and preach to you the word till we all come to greater Christ-likeness. If you receive this teaching you will not be

tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. The trickery of deceived and unbelieving men in spiritual things is very great. And we must guard ourselves against it. But if you listen carefully and become a doer of the word, then you will be rooted and grounded in the truth. And when each of us, then, is speaking the truth in love, we are enabled to grow up, as a body of believers, in all things, into Christ. This whole body, this whole church is joined and knit together by the truth, and by speaking the truth in love. We realize that we need each other and are joined together in this good work of growing up into Christ. Every member counts. Every member has a function. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts and grace as He wills. But when every member is doing their part, when every part does its share, it causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Love is the perfect bond of unity. To see this taking place in our church here is to know that we are walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Look at Ephesians 4: 29 – “Let no corrupt word proceed from your mouth, but what is good, for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Once again here you see that we do what we do in living our Christian life, in order to edify one another; to build one another up in our faith. In order to do that in the things that we say, we must not let corrupt words proceed from our mouth; only good words, words that will impart grace to the hearers. That is, the words that you speak ought to build others up by showing them the need which you have for grace and help from Christ, and which will show them their need of same. Good words come from a humble heart, not a proud and selfish heart which is prone to boast in itself. In this regard, we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit who hears very well, all the words that we speak, and evidently, if we are careless in our speech, angry in our speech, filthy in our speech, or unloving in our speech, He is grieved.

We may, if we are not careful in our speech, be very unmindful of our grieving Him until He makes it known to us in our experience. He is well able to do this. He is witness to all of our words, and if we continue in speaking corrupt words, we may bring upon ourselves the loss of many of His most wonderful blessings and influences. He may pull back from us for a time, and the evidence of that will be that the corruptions of our hearts may prevail with us during that time. Dear Christian, you dare not receive the grace of God in vain. Repent of such conduct and come back and have dealing in prayer with your God. And He who is the your Comforter, Advocate, Helper, and Strengthener of your heart, the One who is your constant companion will return to you, after you confess your sins. He will come back to you in your conscious experience of His blessing and presence. And you will walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit once again.

3rd – To walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit means that the members of the church are walking in the fear of the Lord.

“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified.” “And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” The fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit go hand in hand. They go hand in hand, and they walk together in the Christian’s walk. The nature of what it means to fear of the Lord does not change from Old Testament to New. It is the same in both testaments. It is a healthy and constant spiritual regard for God, and for His blessed word, to live by it, and to do it. It is to stand in awe of Him and to reverence Him and to obey Him, as it is delineated for you in the Bible. You can see how important this was in God’s mind, in His commandments to Old Testament Israel. Deuteronomy 13: 1-5 – “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ – which you have not known – ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart

and with all your soul.” “You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.” “But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk.” “So you shall put away the evil from your midst.”

Now, I hope that you can see that even though we, as the church of Jesus Christ do not put to false teachers to death who would try to turn us away from walking after our God, nevertheless, you can see that it is a sin which is worthy of death. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Only fools despise wisdom and understanding which comes from the word of God. Let us see that the Lord does test us, at times, to see whether we love Him with all of our heart, and whether we will walk after the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if a false prophet were to perform a miracle right in front of our eyes, and then told us that we should follow some other God, or some other false Christ, or false gospel, we should not go along with him, unless we want to prove our profession of faith in Him not to be true. The fear of the Lord is something that may be seen in different degrees in different individual men. Even though it says in our text that the churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, there were no doubt times, of adversity and persecution, where they thought that it would be best to appoint the most God-fearing men among them into positions of responsibility.

Listen to Nehemiah 7: 1 – “Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and God more than many.” In other words, Hanani had regard for God and the things of God more than many. He was not a worldly minded man. He was a man who fulfilled his spiritual responsibilities, and his delegated responsibilities. He did everything that he could to guard the city of God. Are you aware that you have spiritual responsibilities, dear Christian? Well, you do. You have a responsibility to love God and the people of God, to do them good, and to build them up. You have a responsibility to walk in the fear of the Lord; to have a greater regard for Him than for any earthly concern of your own business or your own pleasure. But Jesus says if you will seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all these things shall be added unto you; food and clothing and everything that will truly need in an earthly sense. Why? Because to fear God is to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Psalm 128: 1-4 says – “Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, and who walks in His ways.” “When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy.” “When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy and it shall be well with you.” “Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table.” “Behold thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.”

And what was truly was the greatest of blessings for these churches, we find in the last few words of this verse that we are studying. “And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” God added to them, those who were being saved; those who saw the these churches of people did walk in the fear of the Lord, and they did have great comfort and blessing coming to them from the Holy Spirit because they did so. They joined with them. How important it is that those who come into our midst may see these two things in us as well; the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Those who may have never thought deeply about the truth of the word, or what it means to be saved from their sins, or live a devout Christian life, may indeed see the desirability of it, if we will walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

