

**1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,** Right away, we need to know that this word is used in each of the next four verses as well before it shows up again in chapters 7 and 8. So we know that the reason Paul is taking the time to tell these folks about the God they are serving is because, quite simply, He is going to talk to them about how their theology drives their philosophy; or their view of God drives their view of life. The other three seeming descriptions of God (grace, peace, mercies) are apparently not on Paul's plate. He wants you to know something about God's comfort. **4 who comforts us in all our tribulation,** Perhaps this is the right time to say this carries the idea of a "cheering and supporting influence." Can anybody here enjoy the idea of a cheering and supporting influence? When the walks were long and heavy in my basic combat training, a man that I will remember as the "war machine", Drill Sergeant Sasala would find a way to walk up beside anybody and say something pithy or helpful or encouraging with a glib or knowing little smile that would tell you that your food would not go un-eaten at the objective.

1. We cannot give strength where we have found none.

**that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.** That is why I say "we cannot give strength where we have found none." We do not have any power to give advice if we do not first have a measure of wisdom—at least not advice worth hearing. So it is in the emotional part of men and women: We must have some measure of comfort that comes only from God if we expect to help others in such a comfort.

2. Our comfort that allows us to convey emotional stability to others is found only in concert with sufferings we suffer with Christ.

Think about Paul in Philippians 3:10 and the "fellowship of His suffering."

**5 For as the sufferings** Here again is a word that occurs in the next two verses as well. **of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.** That is why I say "Our comfort that allows us to convey emotional stability to others is found only in concert with sufferings we suffer with Christ." It's true, and we find our comfort from Him. What's the math here? Well, if we suffer the death of Christ in our daily lives, then we can most certainly find Gospel-centered assurance that the Father of mercies will exonerate us, His servants.

One more thing: You may notice that Paul sort of tells us that the consolation/comfort is in proportion to the suffering, for he uses the word "abound" in both aspects. The NASB does a fine job of drawing this out when it speaks of the group traveling with Paul as having "abundant suffering."

**6 Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective** This is a middle voice participle which means that the salvation is working upon itself (the Greek is the word from which we get "energy") as the Corinthians are enduring. This salvation was actually energizing the Corinthian church's endurance of the same sufferings. As they would see, they would feel. As they would feel, they would walk on. **for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer.**

3. Mysteriously, whatever extremes we experience—good or bad—are for the comfort and salvaging of people everywhere.

**Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.** That is why I say "whatever extremes we experience—good or bad—are for the comfort and salvaging of people everywhere." They are to experience salvaging or salvation, and comfort. The question remains: "salvation from what? From sin and Hell? From sin as a believer? From tribulation?"

4. There is an assurance that all those who are suffering for Christ will actually find comfort in their great difficulty.

**7 And our hope for you is steadfast,** The ESV says “unshaken.” **because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.** That is why I say “there is a reasonable assurance that all those who are suffering for Christ will actually find comfort in their great difficulty.” Now, you cannot imagine this, but Paul says “your confidence is shaken. You’re feeling pressed down, but our confidence (verse 7) is unshaken.” You may feel unfit for the life ahead of you, but you need to know straightaway, that you seem to be a believer because of your enduring faith, and some of us who have seen the end of this idea, know that you will...you WILL “partake in his consolation.” Chris Anderson writes in his song “Run to Christ”

*I run to Christ when chased by fear and find a refuge sure.  
“Believe in Me,” His voice I hear; His words and wounds secure.  
I run to Christ when torn by grief And find abundant peace.  
“I too had tears,” He gently speaks; Thus joy and sorrow meet.*

5. This reality of sure comfort does not always arrive immediately.

**8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure,** “There is no way to express how much weight we felt. It was absolutely unbearable.” **above strength,** Or, probably, the “suffering in abundance” of verse 5. **so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves,** we were walking dead. **that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,** That is why I say, “This reality of sure comfort does not always arrive immediately.” Rather, there are desperate times when “dreading one’s life” is a real part of the difficulty that arises in the sufferer’s life. There are those who find comfort only in desperate faith. A desperate faith that says the God Who saved me from death and Hell will yet do it again. He really is, Psalm 3, the “lifter of my head.”

We see, then, the connection between Christ’s deliverance from death and our own. He was raised from the dead by God, and we are told at least, practical connection, then, between Christ’s sufferings and ours—Christ’s death and our experiential death. Simply put...if you look at the Gospel you will see the utter terror of suffering, the utter hopelessness of burial, and the absolute shocking, rocking, powerful thrust of God’s power Who can and does rescue from death. So, do you feel the cold hand of death?

**10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,** Paul takes this fifth point a little further when He speaks of three stages of deliverance—all of them which are related to “trust” (verse 9). If God can be trusted for salvation, He can be trusted now. And...we know there will be a time, ultimately, in which we will be saved. We trust for the future. We trust Him for the past. Now, then, in this great suffering, we find consolation for the present. We trust He is yet delivering us. How? I don’t know, and if you would have looked at Paul, you would have seen what he did not see: “While you are dying, Paul, we are finding....life.”

Now, on this timeless bridge, we must admit...we are not suffering for the Gospel. But if it is effective for being nailed to crosses or tossed in prison or having our homes confiscated...then how much more for the smaller things?

I was watching my son as we enjoyed looking at a baby rabbit at the Tyler’s the other day. He was so interested in the little rabbit staying warm. How did he know to care about the care of that little mammal? My son has experienced cold. When he was 7 years old we were camping with a church group near Mount Pilot (I believe), and Jake shivered in his sleeping bag in that tent on that November night. I knew exactly what to do because the coldest nights of my life still hurt me from maneuvers and training where the men in charge gave you no liner for your jackets and just enough sleep for your body temperature to drop. I groaned from the cold and despaired

even of life...why? So that my son would not be without comfort several years later while we were camping? Perhaps. So that a rabbit would feel warm as people stared upon it? Perhaps. One thing is sure. You can fake sympathy, but you cannot fake empathy.

Hard-working, bread-winning Sandy Ridge member, you would have never asked to lose your job after 8 or 10 or 14 or 26 years of faithful, dependable, stalwart labor. You would have never asked to borrow money to buy your groceries or park one of your cars to make your car insurance go down or to cancel your cable television to afford to give your offerings to the Lord, but because you have faced those hard times, and have felt the crushing weight of those horrible and sundry taxings, you have very much felt the difficulty of loving Christ and have experienced a resurrection of sorts. You are now able to come along side somebody and tenderly instruct them that "God is more concerned with your finances than you are."

Dear Sister in Christ, you would never ask to have a miscarriage (2005, 2006). You would never ask to feel like you were not able to do what "normal women" do. But...because you have been gifted with that heart-breaking, soul-crushing wringing of the soul, you are able to identify with a Christ Who suffers for our sins and, in that suffering, gives special assistance to those who are hurting.

Dear Brother or Sister, you would have never asked for a spouse to be unfaithful to you, and then to blame their adultery on you. You would have never asked for them to say untrue things after years of committed partnership. You may not have been perfect, but you were true to your vows. You would have never asked to lose the loyalty of your best friend and fondest confidant. But...because you have been gifted with that storm in your life...because you have identified with the "suffering of Christ abounding in you (verse 5), you will be able to give the comfort that Christ experienced when He was raised from the dead (verse 9).

We would never ask to be sitting in an emergency room—feeling like we have accomplished little with our days; nothing to do but pray for strangers around the room who are coughing and hacking and complaining (unlike you). The hours and hours of repeated trips where the doctors—who are already overtaxed—afraid of malpractice suits and filled with 20 minute appointments in 15 minute slots—seemingly dismiss you with some meds and send you on your way. Nobody asks for that. But when you know of a brother or sister who is headed to the ER and you know exactly how they will feel if God does not send somebody who is a "cheerful and supporting influence," it will be a very long day for them.

Brother Ron, you would have never asked to take 30 trips to Duke in the last year—learning how to breathe with somebody else's

Blessed widows and widowers, you would never ask to have half your life ripped away when your spouse of 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 years passes on to their reward, but when somebody reaches into the twilight years of their pilgrimage on this earth, you can with the grace you received of the Lord during those same difficult times, reach over and grab that brother or sister in Christ, and help them through—with a timely word, a meal, an evening.

Even myself, I would never ask to feel despondent or alone. Never. But the reason Bill Sturm is the pastor he is is really, quite simple: the most memorable times in my life were when I felt alone: 14 years old; 16 years old; 38 years old....

Maybe there is one in the room who lost a friend in battle. You had to walk through the valley of the shadow of death and then only one of you walked out. Nobody thinks "I want to save somebody from a difficult time so I will give up some of my comfort and consolation for a little while so that I can be God's instrument in the future." But...because you have been prized in such a way as to carry such a load, your connection with others who will face that terror is more meaningful and helpful, and as the text says, salvational.

Now then, Sandy Ridge, I am sure you understand that churches face this as bodies of Christ. Many of you have been here for the long haul. You need to know that the heartbreak you have experienced was not for us to steal upset members from other churches when they experience heartache, but so that we can love other churches who are struggling. So that we can help those pastors reach their parts of town and minister to their heavy-hearted people. Only deep, life-despairing pressure can equip Sandy Ridge to do this. We are equipped.

Let us rise and go to Jesus...