

The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

Lesson 2

Suffering Versus Comfort From God's Perspective

The apostle Paul had spent quite some time in Corinth ministering and building up the church. Nevertheless, that church was full of problems of every kind. His first letter addressed these problems systematically from divisions, to spiritual immaturity to incest to moral laxity of every kind in an effort to admonish and reprove them. He had a "painful visit" with them (2 Cor 2:1) and had written a "sorrowful letter" (2:4) which we don't have. Relations were strained and Paul was concerned. He had gotten some good news from Titus that the church had repented, yet another problem surfaced. False teachers, claiming to be apostles, had criticized Paul, his ministry, and even the gospel he taught them. Second Corinthians is primarily a defense of Paul's ministry.

Read 2 Cor 1:1-11

1. How does Paul present himself? What authority does he claim (2 Cor 1:1)? What important blessings does he pray for them (2 Cor 1:2)?
2. In 2 Cor 1:3, what reason does Paul have to bless God (2 Cor 1:8-10)? What good news did Paul receive after that (2 Cor 7:5-11)?
3. In what sense is the Lord the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort (Psalm 23:4-6; 46:1; 71:20-21; 94:17-19, Luke 2:25-32, Romans 8:18, 31-39)?
4. The Greek word here for comfort is used 29 times in 2 Corinthians and 10 times in 2 Cor 1:3-7. This same word was used by Jesus in John 14:16-17. Who was Jesus talking about and what would this "comforter" do (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15)?
5. Contrast two different views of comfort – a worldly view versus a heavenly view (Jn 14:27; 16:33). By saying "God of all comfort" does Paul exclude any other source of permanent, spiritual comfort that fortifies heart, mind and soul? What type of power is required for this type of comfort (2 Cor 1:9, Eph 1:18-20)?

6. Discouragement, even depression is no respecter of persons. A great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said... "I am the subject of depressions so fearful that I hope none of you ever experience." Could Paul relate to this (2 Cor 1:8)? What about David (Psalm 6:1-7; 13:1-2; 22:1-2; 44:22-25)? What did Job feel about his troubles (Job 13:24; 19:6-10)?

7. Should we as Christians expect trouble, afflictions, and pain (Job 5:7; 14:1, 1 Thessalonians 3:3, 1 Peter 4:12)? Paul's life was an amazing juxtaposition of affliction and comfort. How did Paul describe it in 2 Cor 4:8-11? As far as the quantity of affliction and comfort is concerned, what might we expect (2 Cor 1:5, Rom 8:36-39)?

8. Using scripture can you list some reasons God allows trouble and suffering (1 Peter 1:6-7, Proverbs 17:3, 2 Cor 4:17-18, Genesis 22:1,12; Psalm 119:67, 71; Hebrews 12:5-11, James 1:2-4, Rom 5:3-4, 2 Cor 1:4)? What was Paul's "big picture" long term perspective on suffering in Romans 8:18?

9. Had relations been strained between Paul and the church at Corinth (2 Cor 2:1-5; 7:8-11)? Paul had previously chastised them several times, and he had changed his travel plans to visit them which angered them. Now false teachers had come in questioning Paul's ministry and authority. What comforting message did Paul receive from Titus (2 Cor 7:6-13)?

10. In what way was God enabling Paul to minister to the Corinthians (2 Cor 1:4-6)? In what way were the Corinthians sharing with and helping Paul (2 Cor 1:7-11)? 2 Cor 1 is Paul's testimony of God's ministry to him which is also available to us all. What is God to us (v 3)? What does God do for us (Rom 8:28)? What does God do through us (2 Cor 1:4)?