

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

IN THIS WORLD, WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERINGS: BUT GLORY IS COMING

SECOND CORINTHIANS

✠ II CORINTHIANS

An overview of the Book of Second Corinthians, by Given O. Blakely

Lesson #2

COMMENTARY ON: 1:3-7

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

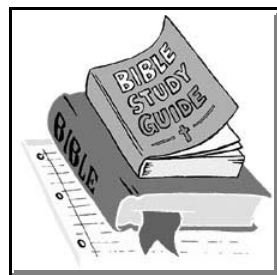
"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

SUFFERINGS AND CONSOLATION

The life of faith brings us into the arena of suffering—suffering for righteousness sake. This is owing to the conflict that exists between this present evil world, and the heavenly places into which we have been raised, and in which we have been made to sit. These sufferings also play a valuable role in orienting us to *"the world to come."* Through them we become more aware of being strangers and pilgrims here, and consequently long the more to be forever with the Lord. However, our sufferings are also matched by a remarkable consolation that comes from above. That consolation causes the star of hope to shine all the brighter. The heart gains strength, and we are enabled to fight the good fight of faith with vigor.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Epistle of Second Corinthians

Lesson Number 2



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Standard Version (2001), KJV=King James Version (1611), NKJV=New King James Version (1982), NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakh (1985), YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG=Friberg Lexicon, UBS=UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA=Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT=Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER=Thayer's Greek Lexicon

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

SUFFERINGS AND CONSOLATION

“ 1:3 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. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. 6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.” ^{KJV} (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures are were not only written “by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16), they were also written with His objective, or “eternal purpose,” in mind. **The Scriptures are not a mere response to the difficulties of life, and the various questions that arise among the people of God.** Neither, indeed, are they intended to be a mere manual of conduct, or a means of establishing an orthodox approach to religion. They have not been given to assist men in formulating a creed, or to

establish proper organizational structure. They have not been given to us to confirm how to best establish the family, the church, and the government. While all of these matters are addressed in Scripture, they are not its heart and soul.

THE WORLD TO COME

The Scriptures have been written with “the world to come” in mind. As it is written, “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, **whereof we speak**, or “about which we

are speaking” ^{NIV} (Heb 2:5). **They are given to us within the context of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the passing of the heavens and the earth, and the day of judgment.** They have been given to us in view of the coming removal of Satan and his hosts (Rev 20:10), the destruction of those who “know not God and obey not the Gospel” (2 Thess 1:8), and the gathering of the people of God to be forever with the Lord (2 Thess 2:1). “Eternal life” in “the world to come” is the point (Mk 10:30; Lk

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18:30). One of the current benefits of salvation is tasting *“of the powers of the world to come”* (Heb 6:5) – holy influences that assist us in preparing for the day of the Lord. **If these realities are forced into the shadowy background of thought, the purpose of the Word of God will not be realized in us.**

The more professing believers speak about this world, the more cloudy the Scriptures become. The more men are immersed in the affairs of this world, the less relevant Jesus will be.

Our text presumes the superiority of *“the world to come,”* and the inferiority of *“this present evil world.”*

IT IS ALL ABOUT CHRIST

Ultimately, of course, the Scriptures are about Christ Jesus. They testify of Him, as He Himself affirmed: *“they are they which testify of Me”* (John 5:39). As it is written, *“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”* (Rev 19:10) – that is, the life and breath of prophecy. They introduce, announce, and expound Christ’s coming into the world,

His life and ministry in the world, His vicarious death and His triumphant resurrection. They speak of His exaltation, intercession, and return in great power and glory. Remove these from the Scriptures and they collapse into meaningless moral teachings. Jesus is to Scripture what a skeleton and blood are to the human body. He provides structure, vitality, and eternal benefit to the Word of God. He is what makes it living.

If we do not read the Scriptures with these things in mind, everything will become distorted in our understanding. Life in this world will thus be exalted to a place of unjustified transcendence. Both blessing and trouble will be seen incorrectly, because this world will appear to be more important and prominent than it really is. Consequently, little thought will be given to preparing for the coming of the Lord and our appointed appearance before the judgment seat of Christ. Life will consequently be lived in vain, even though endless effort is expended and a diversity of experiences are realized. The Bible will be seen as only a sort of moral code for life in this world, instead of providing truth that is essential to enter into *“the world to come.”*

A BASIC POSTULATE

The text before us requires this basic postulate: **The primary citizenship of the children of God is not in this world.** If this is not seen, the whole subject of suffering and tribulation becomes unreasonable. This is why we often hear the question, *“Why do Christians suffer?”* That very question requires a mind-set that leads men to conclude that the primary benefits of salvation take place in this world. However, this is not at all the case. Those who live by faith are appropriately called *“strangers and pilgrims”* in this world (1 Pet 2:11), or *“strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (Heb 11:13). In Christ, our

primary citizenship is in heaven, where our names have been recorded. As it is written, *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”*^{NKJV} (Phil 3:20). These are those of whom, it is said, *“which are written in heaven”* (Heb 12:23).

An Inimical World

Because there is a fundamental enmity between heaven and earth, **this world is aligned against the saints of God.** All that is *“of the world”* is *“NOT of the Father”* (1 John 2:16). The world order itself, independent of its citizenry, is temporal, and thus fights against the people of God. It is a domain to which they cannot be reconciled, for it is weaving under the burden of mortality. **For those in Christ, time introduces jeopardy.** The more aggressive the person is for the heavenly prize, the more time and the experiences in it assert themselves against that individual.

The Flesh

This situation is encapsulated in our very being. Part of our constitution is mortal – *“the flesh.”* Because of this, insightful souls confess, *“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members”* (Rom 7:23). Our *“vile bodies”* (Phil 3:21) must be controlled in the energy of faith, else they have the potential to disqualify us for the eternal prize (1 Cor 9:27).

The Ungodly

Add to this the fact that those who are unregenerated persecute those who are born again. As it is written, *“But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now”* (Gal 4:29). Thus we read, *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Tim 3:12). That is what

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the “ungodly” do to the “godly.”

The Devil

As if this was not difficult enough, we also have an aggressive **unseen** adversary who has successfully brought down every person born of a woman, with the single exception of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is, as it were, stalking us relentlessly. As it is written, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet 5:8). Were it not for the keeping power of God (Jude 1:24-25), we would not be able to successfully contend with this adversary.

them “as though some strange thing happened” unto them” (1 Pet 4:12). They should be informed about these things.

The Experience of Asaph

It is one thing for Asaph to momentarily be confused by the prosperity of the wicked as compared to his own tenuous existence (Psa 73:1-15). Even then, all of his doubts were dissolved when he went “*into the sanctuary of God,*” and was given to understand “*their end*” He then saw the wicked were actually in “*slippery places,*” and were destined to be cast “*down into destruction.*” In a moment they would be brought to desolation, yet Asaph was

avoid a lifeless philosophical view of suffering. The Spirit has spoken enough on this subject, and provided us sufficient examples of suffering to dispel ignorance on the subject. **At some point, we must turn away from listening to the psychiatrists and sociologists, and consider what the Lord has said.**

Candidly, it is wrong to attempt to explain suffering in the flesh. Far better to respond to the greatest of our sufferings as Job the patriarch: “*Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job 1:21). We came into this world helpless, and we will leave it helpless. Why should we be confused about the interim between the beginning and ending of earthly life?

This was the experience of a godly man who lived before men were regenerated, before the Holy Spirit was sent into the heart, and before men were reconciled to God. He lived before the New Covenant, before the Gospel, and before men had an Intercessor in heaven.

QUALIFYING US FOR THE KINGDOM

There is another view of suffering that is worthy of our consideration. **Suffering is also a means of qualifying us to inherit the Kingdom of God.** This is not a human conclusion, but a Divine affirmation. “*So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer*” (2 Thess 1:4-5).

Chastening

There is also the matter of the chastening of the Lord. That chastening, common to all of the children, also involves an element of suffering, for “*Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby*” (Heb 12:11).

enduring his grief. Pondering these determinations, Asaph’s heart was “*grieved,*” and he was “*pierced within.*”^{NASB} He cried out in confession, “*So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*” He perceived that suffering did not separate him from God, or render him incapable of drawing near to God (Psa 73:16-28).

Whatever you may think of worthiness, “*persecutions and tribulations*” have this appointed result: “*you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.*”^{NIB}

In view of these realities, it appears to be foolishness to speculate about why the saints suffer. It should rather be a mystery to us if they did not suffer. In Scripture, there are godly men against whom no sin is recorded, yet they have suffered in unusual ways. They include Job, Joseph, Daniel, and Timothy – as well as many others – not to mention our blessed Lord Himself.

This was the experience of a godly man who lived before men were regenerated, before the Holy Spirit was sent into the heart, and before men were reconciled to God. He lived before the New Covenant, before the Gospel, and before men had an Intercessor in heaven. It simply is inappropriate for those living in the blazing glory of “*the Sun of righteousness*” to respond in a manner that is even inferior to that of Asaph. However men may seek to justify such responses, they are simply out of order, sinful, and unacceptable.

ONE OTHER PERSPECTIVE

There is one other view of this matter that we must see. While men may tell us that God is considerate of our uncomely responses to suffering, that is not at all how God has revealed Himself. Through Isaiah, God revealed that He takes special note of improper assessments of grief and suffering. “*The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come*” (Isa 57:1). Another version reads,

Not A Subject for Confusion

No person of faith should marvel when difficulties come upon

The Avoidance of Human Wisdom

Also, great care must be taken to

*“The righteous perish, and **no one ponders it in his heart**; devout men are taken away, and **no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.**”^{NIV}*

This is speaking of the ultimate suffering, which is death. All of the answers for the removal of the righteous from the earth are not provided – but one overriding reason is given: they are *“taken away to be spared of evil.”* Another version reads, *“Yes, because of the evil*

times the upright is taken off.”^{NJB} I have often pondered this in regard to the removal of righteous people whom I have known. They were delivered from evil days and times that would have especially vexed them.

The thing to be seen is that God is managing the experiences of His people. In that management, He will not allow them to be tempted beyond their ability – even in their sufferings (1 Cor 10:13). Therefore, rather than being

confused about sufferings, we are to cast all of our care upon Him, convinced by faith that He cares for us. As it is written, *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”* (1 Pet 5:7).

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

I have taken the time to briefly introduce the subject of suffering because that it the theme of the text before us. Because suffering is inherent in the life of faith, it behooves us to have a proper view of it, else it will overcome us.

BLESSED BE GOD!

“^{1:3} Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ”

Our text opens with an expression that flows from spiritual understanding. **One of the manners in which faith expresses itself is found in proper perceptions and declarations of God Himself.** This has always been true, whether in individuals before the Law (like Enoch, Job, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph), during the administration of the Law (like Moses and the Prophets), or during this *“day of salvation.”* Since this time is marked by great revelation, *“better promises”* (Heb 8:6b), a *“better covenant”* (Heb 8:6a), and a *“better hope”* (Heb 7:19), **superior articulations concerning God are to be found among us.** It is wholly inappropriate for improper views of God Himself to be held by those who are standing in a greater light and experiencing a greater blessing.

It is true that the text before us was revealed by the Spirit to Paul. It is also true that He perceived it, and fully expected for us to do the same.

BLESSED BE GOD

“Blessed be God . . . ” Other versions read, *“Praise be to God,”*^{NIV} *“Praise be to the God,”*^{BBE} and *“All praise to the God.”*^{NLT}

This expression is found at least five times in Scripture (Psa 66:29; 68:35; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; 1Pet 1:3). As I have already suggested, it is an expression of insight and understanding. Ordinarily the

Scriptures represent God as blessing. Here God Himself is blessed.

ADDRESSING OUR CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

“We are hearing this anguished cry from increasing numbers of the people . . . The abandoned hymns were composed by men and women who were mature in the faith, had often suffered much for Christ, and wrote from deep experience and Biblical knowledge. Today’s church has substituted choruses composed by those who are mostly young in years and in the faith. They have little to offer but catchy tunes, a snappy beat for clapping, loud noise, and very little true reverence for our Lord – hardly appropriate for entering God’s holy and awesome presence.

“Sadly, today’s “worshippers” seem content to sing over and over, for example, ‘I will sing of your love forever,’ or ‘I love to praise you, Lord,’ or ‘We have come into your house to worship You,’ or similar phrases. Why are they empty? The focus is more upon self than God – what I’m giving Him rather than His love and grace to me.

“To repeat, ‘I will sing of your love forever,’ is not singing His love at all. You are only saying you are going to sing His love. Stop promising to sing His love and do it! Sing of His love! Recite what He has done, how much He has loved you, and tell Him how much you love Him and why.”

Dave Hunt, Berean Call, April 2004

The word *“blessed”* does not speak of a condition, or state, but of the **articulation** or expression of praise – **insightful praise.** It is ascribing to the Lord the honor that is due to Him. It is fulfilling the Psalmic admonition, *“Give*

unto the LORD the glory due unto His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psa 29:2; 96:8).

Before Christ, David admonished the people to bless the Lord: *“And David said to all the congregation, **Now bless the LORD your God**”* (1 Chron 29:20). In Nehemiah’s day, when they had completed the wall, the Levites admonished the people, *“Stand up and **bless the Lord your God for ever and ever: and blessed by Thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise**”* (Neh 9:5). David personally resolved, *“I will bless the Lord,”* even affirming He would do so *“at all times”* (Psa 16:7; 34:1).

In blessing God, the experiences of life are seen from the higher, or heavenly, perspective. Life is not viewed from the lowlands of human experience, but from the standpoint of Divine objective. The hand of God is thus seen in human affairs. Some examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

- Thus Eleazer said of his journey to find Isaac a wife, *“the Lord hath prospered my way”* (Gen 24:56).
- After Isaac had re-dug the wells of Abraham, stopped up by the Philistines, he said, *“the Lord hath made room for us”* (Gen 26:22).
- When giving birth to Reuben Leah said, *“Surely the Lord hath seen my affliction”* (Gen 29:32).

- After Jacob had spent some time with him, Laban confessed, *“I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake”* (Gen 30:27).
- When Esau asked Jacob concerning those who were traveling with him, Jacob replied, *“The children which God hath graciously given thy servant”* (Gen 33:5).
- Jacob also said to Esau, *“God hath dealt graciously with me”* (Gen 33:11).
- When Joseph faced his convicted brothers he said to them, *“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive”* (Gen 50:20).
- Joseph also said of his time in Egypt, *“For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house”* (Gen 41:51).
- After their sojourn in the wilderness, and before his death, Moses said to Israel, *“The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude”* (Deut 1:10).
- Again Moses said, *“For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing”* (Deut 2:7).
- When Joshua readied himself to depart from this world, he said to the people, *“And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof”* (Josh 23:14).
- When assessing his own grievous infirmity Paul said, *“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me,*

lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Cor 12:7).

What is being expressed in these, and similar, statements? **The people were blessing God!** They had seen Him at work in their own affairs, whether good or evil was experienced. Like Job, they could see the Lord in the extremities of life: *“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD”* (Job 1:21). Rather than his afflictions moving him to curse God, as Satan said he would (Job 1:21), **they moved the patriarch to bless God.** As David so well said, the Lord is *“worthy to be praised”* (Psa 18:3).

When Paul says *“Blessed be God,”* he is introducing the words that follow. The phrase itself is not blessing the Lord,

Lord Jesus, not us. His affiliation with us is only through His Son. It is imperative that this be seen. While God has genuine love and care for us, it all is through the Son, and never independently of Him.

In the Gospels, Jesus refers to God as *“My Father”* forty-seven times (Matt 7:21; 10:32,33; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19; 20:23; 24:36; 25:34; 26:39,42,53; Lk 10:22; 22:29; 24:49; John 6:32,65; 8:19,28, 38,49,54; 10:17,18,30,32,37; 12:26; 14:7, 12,20,21,23,28; 15:1,8,15,23,24; 16:10; 18: 11; 20:17,21).

This is not a small point with the Spirit. The Father chose the Son – He was God’s *“elect”* (Isa 42:1; 1 Pet 2:6). He commissioned the Son (John 10:17-18; 12:49; 14:31). The Father *“sent the Son”* into the world (John 5:23; 10:36; 1 John 4:14). Jesus was *“begotten”* of the Father

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THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ”

When the Scriptures are read with discernment, it will become apparent that the Holy Spirit moved holy men to speak very specifically about the God of heaven. If eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3), **then our knowledge of Him must not be general or vague.** This verse is a case in point.

God is frequently referred to as *“the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; 3:14; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). He is also called *“the God of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph 1:17). **This confirms that God’s primary relationship is with the**

(John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9). The effectiveness of His death was owing to the Father delivering Him up (Rom 8:32). He raised the Son from the dead (Acts 13:30; 17:31; Rom 10:9; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12). The Father exalted the Son (Phil 2:9; Eph 1:20-22; Col 1:18; Heb 1:4; 1 Pet 3:22). He is, in every vital sense of the word, the *“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

But what does all of that mean? **It means that God receives us because of Jesus – and only because of Jesus.** He does not receive us because of our works or our person, but because we have been *“made accepted”* in His beloved Son (Eph 1:6). Whether in this world or at the time Jesus returns, the **ONLY** way to be accepted God is to be *“found”* in Christ (Phil 3:9). **No person, regardless of the length of time they have been a “Christian,” or the degree to which**

they have advanced in morality and Bible knowledge, can have dealings with God independently of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is not the smallest leniency in this matter.

When Paul says "Blessed be God,"

he does so with the keenest awareness of this glorious reality. God is "our Father," to be sure. However, He is **primarily "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** No man can at any time, whether initially or otherwise, come to God apart from Christ. That is simply the

way it is. This phrase eliminates the validity of any and all gods who are **not** represented as the "Father of our LORD Jesus Christ." A view of God that ignores Jesus Christ is wholly spurious, and is to be discarded with haste.

THE FATHER OF MERCIES

"^{3b} . . . the Father of mercies . . ." Other versions read, "Father of compassion,"^{NIV} "Father of compassions,"^{DARBY} "The merciful Father,"^{NJB} and "the source of every mercy."^{NLT}

This phrase is more powerful than "the merciful Father" rendering of the New Jerusalem Bible. It is not intended

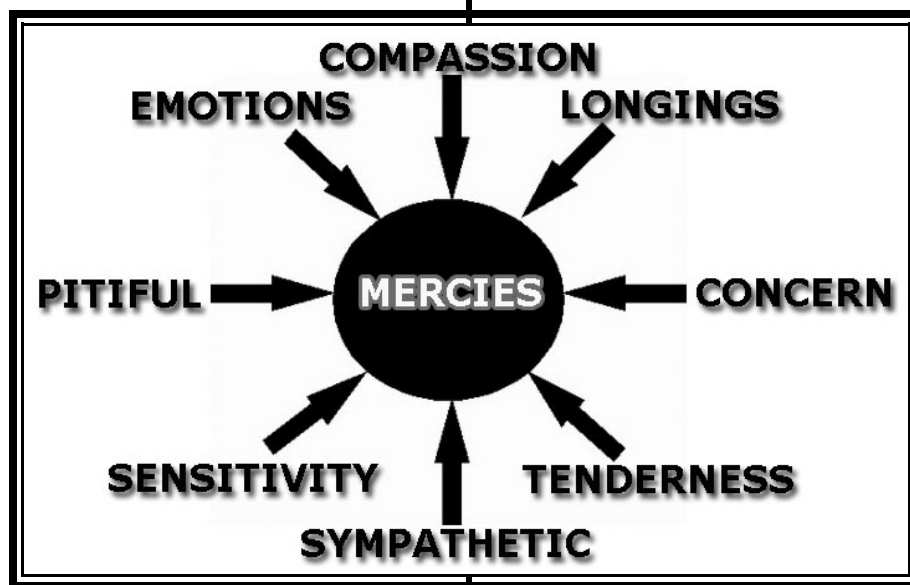
involves the thought of **emotions** and **longings**.^{THAYER} Sympathy is inherent in the word, as well as the motivation to be **sympathetic** and **pitiful**.^{FRIBERG} There is also the idea of **concern** and **tenderness**, and the implication of **sensitivity**.^{LOUW-NIDA}

This a part of the Divine nature – an aspect of the character of God. He is

Jesus: i.e. "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies."

Here, the mercy of God is **not** seen as an abstract principle, or mere theoretical consideration. Paul is not building a cold theology to be bound upon men, but a context in which comforting words will be ministered. **The salvation of God is not being accomplished within the context of harsh laws and regulations, but within the framework of the tender mercies of the Lord.** That speaks with abundant clarity about the condition of fallen humanity. Thus, it is "according to His mercy" that God has "saved us" (Tit 3:5).

By saying "the Father of mercies," the Spirit has traced all tender considerations and gentle workings back to the God of heaven. It was not only His purpose to save us, but to do so in the precise manner required to enable a triumphant recovery from sin and degradation, producing a life of spiritual constancy. As we will find, that involves the consistent experience of His marvelous mercy. **A salvation that is without mercy is no salvation at all, and is not from God.**



to be a mere definition, but rather an exposition of the Source of mercy. The word "Father" is frequently used in this way – to explain the source of benefits we are receiving, rather than to simply define God. Thus we read of "the Father of glory" (Eph 1:17), the "God and Father of all" (Eph 4:6), "the Father of spirits" (Heb 12:9), and "the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

The word "mercies" is a large word. It includes the ideas of **compassion** and **pity**. The word also

the Father, or Source of all mercies. God has revealed Himself as "full of compassion, and gracious, and plenteous in mercy" (Psa 86:15; 103:8), and "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:1).

"Mercies" include compassion, a deep concern, a longing to be pitiful and considerate, and to do it tenderly and with sensitivity. That is God's nature. This is not done indiscriminately, else Satan and the world of fallen angels would receive "mercies." It is not humanity in general that receives His kind and beneficial consideration, but those who are in Christ

This is one of the primary reasons harsh and legalistic religion is to be held in disdain. Men need mercy more than rules, for mercy tenderizes the heart do commandments are not longer "grievous," and a fervent quest for purity is not only desired, but zealously pursued. Where these qualities are not found, mercy has not been experienced in truth. It is still true, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47). Have you not found it to be so?

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

“^{3c} . . . and the God of all comfort.” Other versions read, “God of all consolation,”^{RSV} “God of all encouragement,”^{DARBY} and “the God who gives every possible encouragement.”^{NJB} The word “comfort” means “a calling near to help . . . encouragement . . . consolation, solace, and refreshment.”^{THAYER} “To cause someone to be encouraged or consoled.”^{LOUW-NIDA}

Remember, in this passage Paul is blessing the Lord. He is giving insightful praise to “the God of salvation” (Psa 68:20), or “the God of our salvation” (1 Chron 16:35; Psa 65:5; 68:19; 79:9; 85:4), or “the God of my salvation” (Psa 18:46; 25:5; 27:9; 51:14; 88:1; Mic 7:7; Hab 3:18). **He is tracing every aspect of salvation back to God, who is its Architect.** Whatever consolation and encouragement the saints enjoy comes from “the God of all comfort.” Wherever there is a fatigued soul that experiences renewal and revitalization, the Almighty God has been at work. He is, in every sense of the word “the God of all comfort.”

There is a certain emphasis placed upon comfort that greatly enhances the significance of this text. Lamech, the father of Noah, was the first man to speak of comfort. “And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son: and he called his name Noah, saying, **This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed**” (Gen 5:29). Isaac was “comforted” by his new wife Rebekah, after his mother had died (Gen 24:67). When Joseph saw his brothers after more than thirteen years, “he comforted them” (Gen 50:21).

As time progressed, those who put their trust in God became more conversant with “comfort.” David spoke of God’s rod and staff comforting Him (Psa 23:4). Boldly he confessed to the Lord, “Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side” (Psa 71:21). In the hour of trial, he pled with the Lord, “Show me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be

ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me” (Psa 86:17). He asked the Lord to allow His “merciful kindness” to be for his comfort (Psa 119:76).

Through Isaiah, the Lord commissioned that His people be

aforettime were written for our learning, **that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope**” (Rom 15:4).

One of the commissions to the church is that its assemblies should result in everyone being “comforted” (1 Cor

One of the commissions to the church is that its assemblies should result in everyone being “comforted.” The Thessalaonians were admonished to “comfort one another” with words concerning the coming of the Lord

comforted. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” (Isa 40:1). Again, the people were to herald the fact that God comforts His people: “Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for **the LORD hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted**” (Isa 49:13). Again it is written, “**For the LORD shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places**” (Isa 51:3). Again, “**I, even I, am He that comforteth you.**” (Isa 51:12). And again, “Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: **for the LORD hath comforted His people**” (Isa 52:9). With a Divine emphasis that consoles the heart God said, “As one whom his mother comforteth, **so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem**” (Isa 66:13). The Lord was making men more conversant with “comfort.”

In Christ’s initial message to the people He read from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, in which it is written, “To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; **to comfort all that mourn**” (Isa 61:2). The Scriptures themselves are designed for our comfort. As it is written, “For whatsoever things were written

14:31). The Thessalaonians were admonished to “**comfort one another**” with words concerning the coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4:18). When they assembled together they were told, “Wherefore **comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do**” (1 Thess 5:11).

As God Himself is known as the One “that comforteth,” so those who are employed by Him minister comfort to His people (2 Cor 7:6). This comfort is referred to as “the comfort of love” (Phil 2:1) because it proceeds from a loving and considerate Lord.

All of this, and more, is involved in God being “the God of all comfort.” This also reveals to us the very nature of spiritual life. **There is kind of fatigue that occurs when we fight the good fight of faith, together with certain discouragements.** Our inner energies are often depleted, and we need to be renewed, refurbished, and refreshed. All of these needs are addressed in the benefit of “comfort,” all of which comes from “the God of ALL comfort.”

Our text will confirm the necessity and marvelous reality of comfort, showing it to be a most precious provision.

COMFORTED IN ALL OUR TRIBULATION

“^{4a} Who comforteth us in all our tribulation . . . ”

Having established that it is God’s nature to comfort His people, and that He is forward to do so, the Apostle now bears testimony to his own experience of that comfort. **In this, He speaks for all who are working in the vineyard of the Lord.** This is a common experience, and it is our business to recognize it and bless God because of it.

COMFORTETH US

“Who comforteth us . . . ” Other versions read, *“who consoles us,”* ^{NRSV} *“who encourages us,”* ^{DARBY} and *“He supports us.”* ^{NJB}

Comfort is not a possibility, but a reality. God is not the one who CAN comfort us, but rather the one who DOES comfort us: but “who COMFORTETH us.” Wherever there is a person who is living by faith, God is at work, comforting them.

Actually, the Lord uses appointed and effective means to accomplish this comfort, or encouragement.

- Elsewhere we read of comfort coming to us **through the Scriptures** (Rom 15:4).
- Those who **prophesy** do so in order to our comfort (1 Cor 14:3).
- The **comfort received by the Corinthians** also become a comfort to Paul himself (2 Cor 7:13).
- **Knowing of the good estate** of the Philippians brought comfort to Paul (Phil 2:19).
- **Three Jewish converts** (Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus who was surnamed Justus, were a comfort to Paul (Col 4:11).

• **News of the Thessalonians spiritual stability** brought comfort to Paul (1 Thess 3:7).

• Once **the coming of Titus** was a source of comfort to Him (2 Cor 7:6).

• Paul anticipated receiving comfort **from the mutual faith** of brethren in Rome (Rom 1:12).

These are examples of **how** the Lord comforts His people. **There is no reason for a child of God to remain in a state of discouragement.** Even though such occasions happen, there is provision to recover from them.

Renewing of the Holy Spirit

This is an aspect of the *“renewing of the Holy Spirit,”* which is one of the means by which we are saved. As it is written, *“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”* ^{NKJV} (Titus 3:5).

This *“renewing of the Holy Spirit”* involves those in Christ being *“transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”* ^{NRSV} (2 Cor 3:18). That marvelous transformation is an ongoing work, moving us from one degree of conformity to Christ’s image to another (Rom 8:29).

Comfort is an indispensable part of that *“renewing.”* Through it the human spirit is refurbished and strengthened. **Encouragement enables the saints to gain ground when**

setbacks have been experienced. It is the factor that enables them to not be *“distressed,”* even though they are *“troubled on every side.”* It is what brings them to avoid *“despair,”* even when they are *“perplexed.”* When persecutions are leveled against the people of God, *“comfort”* moves them into an acute awareness that they are *“not forsaken.”* When life deals devastating blows to them, casting them down, comfort raises the flag of hope, affirming they are *“not destroyed”* (2 Cor 4:9).

Comfort is not a possibility, but a reality. God is not the one who CAN comfort us, but rather the one who DOES comfort us: but *“who COMFORTETH us.”* **Wherever there is a person who is living by faith, God is at work, comforting them.** Anywhere there is a person who is not grieving or quenching the Spirit, comfort is being realized from God. There is no such thing as fighting the good fight of faith without realizing the comfort that God alone can, and does, give.

IN ALL OUR TRIBULATION

“. . . in all our tribulation . . . ” Other versions read, *“in all our affliction,”* ^{NASB} *“in all our troubles,”* ^{NIV} *“in all our troubles,”* ^{NJB} and *“in every hardship.”* ^{NJB}

Particularly in the Western world, there is a view of living by faith that affirms victory consists of the **absence** of trouble and sorrow. **There are numerous texts that are cited in justification of this erroneous postulate.** Here are a few of them.

- *“Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee”* (Psa 91:6-7).
- *“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of*

The Role of Affliction and Comfort are powerfully expounded, showing the nature of salvation— by Given O. Blakely

me, saith the LORD” (Isa 54:17).

- “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:7).
- “But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (Prov 1:33).

These promises are true in every sense of the word. **However, they are not announcements of exemption from trouble, but of triumph IN trouble.** They would have no meaning if conflict was not endured, and opposition was not actually encountered. Victory assumes conflict, for where there is no war there can be no victory.

The Words of Jesus

Rather than promising immunity to trouble and affliction, Jesus boldly announced that His disciples were sure to face such things.

- “These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. **In the world ye shall have tribulation:** but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
- “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, **therefore the world hateth you**” (John 15:19).
- “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, **they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also**” (John 15:20).

The Teaching of the Apostles

The Apostles continued with the same line of reasoning.

- “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that **we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God**” (Acts 14:22).
- “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus **shall suffer**

persecution” (2 Tim 3:12).

- “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: **for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto**” (1 Thess 3:3).

Suffering is a Prelude to Glory

In fact, being forever with the Lord is predicated upon suffering with Him in this world.

- “**If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us**” (2 Tim 2:12).
- “**And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so**

reacts against those who believe. The world “cannot” love the people of God, as Jesus stated (John 7:7; 15:19). They hold citizenship in another world, are motivated by different principles, and do not love this world. They have values that conflict with those of the world. They long for things that are not of this world. They have been “*delivered from this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4).

Those Experiencing Tribulation for Jesus Will Be Comforted by God

God is described as “*the God of all comfort.*” Now it is affirmed that He comforts us “*in ALL our tribulation.*” That is, **it is not possible for faith to bring tribulation to us without it**

That is, it is not possible for faith to bring tribulation to us without it also bringing comfort from God. If life appears to contradict this affirmation, then we must ask the Lord to open our eyes, and give us the strength to wait upon Him.

be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17).

- “**And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God**” (Phil 1:28).
- “**So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer**” (2 Thess 1:5).

Comfort Presumes Tribulation

The promise of comfort presumes the presence of tribulation. **Faith sets us in opposition to the world, and thus necessarily incurs its resistance.** Even though the world is not able to precisely identify the reason for this conflict, it is able to sense it, and thus

also bringing comfort from God. If life appears to contradict this affirmation, then we must ask the Lord to open our eyes, and give us the strength to wait upon Him.

God is described as “*God, that comforteth those that are cast down*” (2 Cor 7:6). There is no possibility that this is not right, or that it is an exaggeration. For a moment, it may appear to Elijah as though his persecutors have gained the upper hand. But as he waits upon the Lord, an angel is sent to comfort and strengthen him (1 Kgs 19:1-8). **The Lord comforted he who was cast down!** For thirteen long years, it may have seemed that Joseph had been abandoned to the will of his enemies. Their lies seemed to triumph over him, as well as their prison. Of that entire tenure the Scriptures say, “*He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him*

If you are discouraged, look up. God will not forsake you, but will comfort you. Just as surely as He commanded the prophets to “comfort” His people Israel (Isa 40:1), so He will command you to be comforted.

go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance; to bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom” (Psa 105:17-22). The Lord comforted he who was cast down!

Now the Spirit affirms that God comforts His people in ALL of their tribulation! **None of their sufferings go unnoticed, or are left unrequited.** When life in this world dissipates our strength, God will cause us to be strengthened again. When the battle causes us to be discouraged, the Lord will

encourage us again. God DOES comfort those who are “cast down” – the “downcast,” ^{NKJV} “depressed,” ^{NASB} “distressed,” ^{NJB} and “discouraged.” ^{NLT} **That is His manner, His character, and His nature.** If He should fail to do this, He would deny Himself, and “*He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Tim 2:13).

If you are discouraged, look up. God will not forsake you, but will comfort you. Just as surely as He commanded the prophets to “comfort” His people Israel (Isa 40:1), so **He will command you to be comforted.** It may be through the

Holy Spirit enlivening some Scriptural text to you. It may come from a man or woman of God who will speak a word to you. It may come from some deed of kindness done to you, or from angelic hosts adjusting your circumstances. **But be sure of this, a command will surely go forth from the throne for you to be comforted, and it will surely be fulfilled.** That is something you must believe, for it is the truth.

Our tribulation would surely do us in if it were not for this comfort-factor. Can you not confess with David, “*Unless the LORD had been my Help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence*” (Psa 94:17). Asaph once confessed “*my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped*” (Psa 73:2). **But God came through, and he was enabled to enter the sanctuary and see things clearly** (Psa 73:17). He was comforted. The Lord will do not less for you! In fact, you are living in the time when “*much more*” is being ministered.”

THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO COMFORT

^{4b} . . . *that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*”

We will now see that comfort is not an end of itself. That is, God does not comfort us only so we ourselves may be comforted. Because of His care for us, that is involved, but it is not the end of the subject. **We must look beyond ourselves in this matter, not considering our tribulation to be the only or primary trial.** In salvation we truly experience deliverance from self-centeredness, as this text will confirm.

THAT WE MAY BE ABLE

“ . . . *that we may be able.*” Other versions read, “*so that we can,*” ^{NIV} and “*that we also may be able.*” ^{DOUAY}

The word “*able*” means “to be able, to have power . . . to be able to do something . . . to be capable, strong, powerful.” ^{THAYER} “Of capacity or ability, be able, be capable of, can, have power to.” ^{FRIBERG} “Can, be able to, be capable of; can do, able to

do.” ^{UBS} “To be able to do something.” ^{LOUW-NIDA} “To be able, capable, strong enough to do.” ^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Here, then, is something that men cannot do by nature. **Whatever they are enabled to do cannot be done independently of being personally comforted by God.**

When the Lord comforts His people, He is not only renewing their strength. He is also imparting to them an ability that is essential in the economy of salvation.

Human Ability

Sin has blasted human ability, even though it may not appear so. There remains a remarkable aptitude in the human constitution, as is confirmed by the many inventions of men. This circumstance only serves to highlight how signally intelligent and capable Adam was when he was created. The two things he did prior to the fall confirms this to be the case. First, the Lord brought everything formed out of the ground – every beast of

the field and every fowl of the air – to Adam “*to see what he would call them.*” It is written that “*whatever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field*” (Gen 2:20).

This is a most remarkable feat. In 1909, it was estimated there were 2,810 generations of birds, and 18,937 species. ^{Systema Naturae, 1758} Later estimates range from 10,000 to 16,000 different species. ^{Stresemann} In 1996, The World Conservation Union issued a study of threatened animals. The following quotation is found in that volume. “Furthermore, there are currently about 1.5 to 1.8 million named species, but it is estimated that the actual number of species in the world ranges from 5 to 10 million.” ^{1996 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals} Other estimates are provided in Thomas Wolosz “How Many Species Are There?” He puts the number at “30 to 50 million.” ¹⁹⁸⁸ In 2003, in the book “Just How Many Species Are There, Anyway?” Michael Rosenzweig said, “Right now we can only guess that the correct answer for the total number of species lies between 1

and 100 million."

Adam's Wisdom

It is generally understood that many species of animals were destroyed in the flood. This being true, modern species lists are much smaller than represented in the creation. While this is all in the realm of theory, it gives us a sort of feel concerning the magnitude of Adam's wisdom and ability prior to the fall. At that time, there was no record of any mistakes or deficiencies on Adam's part. Nor, indeed, is he depicted as asking a lot of questions. In fact, when God gave Eve to him, he was fully cognizant of what had happened. He responded, *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh"* (Gen 2:24).

Men Must Be Made Able

However, when sin *"entered into the world, and death by sin"* (Rom 5:12), **it also brought in a certain inaptitude.** This is particularly true respecting spiritual matters. Even when we are *"born again,"* we require Divine assistance to be made *"able."* God must provide a way of escape for us to **"be able"** to endure temptation (1 Cor 10:13). It is necessary for God to strengthen us with might by His Spirit in the inner man if we are to be **"able to comprehend with all saints"** the magnificent extent of God's love (Eph 3:18). Our God provides us with armor, that we be **"be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"** (Eph 6:11,13). He alone can provide a shield that we **"may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked"** one (Eph 6:17).

Now the Spirit expounds the effect of the comfort of God upon the saints of God. Through it they receive an ability that is not only good, but **essential** to the saint's safe negotiation through the straits of this present evil world.

TO COMFORT THEM WHICH ARE IN ANY TROUBLE

"... to comfort them which are in any trouble..." Other versions read, *"to comfort them that are in any affliction,"* ^{NASB} *"to console those who are*

in any affliction," ^{NRSV} *"give comfort to others who are in trouble,"* ^{BBE} *"to encourage those who are in any tribulation,"* ^{DARBY} *"to comfort those who are in all distress,"* ^{DOUAY} and *"to come to the support of others, in every hardship of theirs."* ^{NJB}

Immediately we see there is something common about *"trouble"* – the *"trouble"* is result from living by faith and walking in the Spirit. On the surface, the *"trouble"* may appear to be different. Here are some examples of these seeming differences.

- Job's possessions, children, and health were taken from him by Satan himself (Job 1-2).
- Ishmael mocked Isaac (Gen 21:9).
- Joseph's brothers hated him and plotted against him (Gen 37:4,19-23).
- Joseph was unjustly sent to prison and put in fetters (Gen 39:20; Psa 105:18).
- Moses had to endure a recalcitrant and unthankful people (Deut 9:24).
- King Saul sought to kill David (1 Sam 19:1).
- David had to flee from the treachery of his own son, Absalom (2 Sam 15:13).
- Jezebel threatened Elijah (1 Kings 19:2).
- Jeremiah was thrown into a pit (Jer 38:6).
- Those who heard Jeremiah rejected his words and spoke against him (Jer 18:18).
- Although himself young, and in the

Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel's wife died, and God told him to forebear crying or mourning (Ezek 24:15-18).

- Daniel was thrown to the lions (Dan 6:16).
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into a fiery furnace (Dan 3:20-22).
- The Apostles were beaten by their own countrymen (Acts 5:40).
- Besides his many imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, and the likes, Paul endured a grievous *"thorn"* in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-9).
- When in Asia, Paul *"despaired of life"* (2 Cor 1:8).
- Some slanderously reported that Paul taught, *"Let us do evil that good may come"* (Rom 3:8).
- The Apostles were *"defamed,"* and *"made as the filth of the world,"* appearing to be *"the offscouring of all things"* (1 Cor 4:13).
- Timothy had frequent *"infirmities"* (1 Tim 5:23).
- Some *"had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth"* (Heb 11:36-38).
- Some endured hard and lengthy famines (Gen 12:10; 26:1; 41:36; Ruth 1:1; 2 Sam 21:1; 1 Kgs 18:2; 2 Kgs

Immediately we see there is something common about "trouble" – the "trouble" is result from living by faith and walking in the Spirit. On the surface, the "trouble" may appear to be different.

25:3).

Indeed, “trouble” takes many forms. It can come in the form of thought and fears (Psa 34:4; 119:113). It can take the form of care and anxiety (Matt 13:22; Phil 4:6). There can be hard natural circumstances (2 Cor 7:5), fierce persecutors (Psa 119:157; 142:6), and even times when the elements seem to be against us (2 Cor 11:26). Trouble can come in the form of illness, death in the family, national peril, and being cut off from your brethren.

The world conveniently

“Comfort” – comfort sent from heaven – is designed to alleviate the circumstances caused by being in this world, a foreign land, and being hounded by our adversary the devil. It makes little difference what outward or inward form the trouble takes. **It has to do with heavenly citizens being in this world.** It has to do with those possessing eternal life being in the realm where death dominates. It pertains to a blessed people being in a cursed world. It is the result of walking by faith among those who are walking by sight, and living in the Spirit among those who are living in the flesh.

our present location. If this is not understood, we will not be able to receive the “the comfort” God gives. This is exactly the circumstance of which God spoke through Isaiah. “*To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear*” (Isa 28:12). **Dominated by unbelief, the Israelites could not associate Divine refreshment with their own miserable condition.**

The text affirms that God DOES comfort His people. It does not say that we can comfort others IF we have been comforted by God. **It is assumed that if we have been living by faith, we have experienced trouble, and have therefore been comforted:** “*the same comfort God has given us.*”^{NLT}

Our Own Treasure

When we comfort others, we must take our resources from our own treasure chest. We cannot borrow from the resources of others. This is involved in our Lord’s saying: “*Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old*” (Mat 13:52).

Perhaps a few examples of such comforting words would be in order. Here are expressions of those who had experienced the comfort of God, and passed it along to others.

- “*I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill. Selah.*” (Psa 3:4)
- “*I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and He gave ear unto me.*” (Psa 77:1)
- “*In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and He heard me*” (Psa 120:1).
- “*I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears*” (Psa 34:4)
- “*For indeed he [Epaphroditus] was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have*

In the kingdom of Christ, you cannot give to someone else what you yourself have not received. This is a case where “the husbandman” must be “first partaker of the fruits

categorizes “trouble,” then develops professed experts to assist people in those troubles. That is the world’s manner, and it has successfully convinced the modern church to adopt its strategy. Thus there are specialists in encouraging and comforting the young and the old, married and unmarried. We have specialists in dealing with the “addicted,” and the divorced. There are specialized ministries for discouraged preachers, and business people. It all has the appearance of wisdom.

Our text affirms there is a comfort that can be ministered to those who are “in **any** trouble.” The area of genuine expertise is not the trouble, but the comfort – which is designed for those who are in “**ANY** trouble,” “**any** affliction,”^{NASB} or “**any** tribulation.”^{DARBY}

All “trouble” is common in that it is in “**this present evil world,**” and is experienced in “**this vile body.**” It comes because of our faith, and because we are “*strangers and pilgrims in the earth.*” The devil is the one who promotes it.

BY THE COMFORT

“... by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Other versions read, “with the comfort we ourselves have received from God,”^{NIV} “with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God,”^{NRSV} “through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged of God,”^{DARBY} and “to give them the same comfort God has given us.”^{NLT}

In the kingdom of Christ, you cannot give to someone else what you yourself have not received. This is a case where “the husbandman” must be “first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim 2:6).

This also means that the comfort God delivers to us is not built around our circumstances. Rather it is built around His “eternal purpose.” Its objective is not to clarify our trouble, but to clear up the goal. Its aim is not to spell out where we are, but delineate where we are going. **In Christ Jesus, encouragement has more to do with our ultimate destiny than**

sorrow upon sorrow." (Phil 2:27)

☛ *"Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me"* (2 Tim 3:11).

There is only one agenda being served in Christ Jesus the Lord, and that is God's "eternal purpose." Objectively, it has to do with conforming us to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), bringing us to Himself (1 Pet 3:18), and gathering us together in one in the Son (Eph 1:10). His purpose involves being presented without fault in His presence with exceeding joy (Jude 24-25), and bruising Satan under our feet (Rom 16:20). He is bringing us to the point where we will inherit the earth (Matt 5:8), and reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:12). Subjectively, it is showing us the way out of temptation (1 Cor 10:13), growing us up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), and causing us to triumph in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 2:14).

Comfort is effectually ministered when these realities become more clear in our hearts and minds, thereby neutralizing the power of trouble. If you can make the destiny of the saints more clear to them even though they are "troubled," you have comforted them with the same comfort wherewith you yourself was comforted of God.

Valid Credentials

To the world, "credentials" are very important. Their "credentials" come from men, and are bestowed upon men by men. They are, in every sense of the word, of man, by man, and for man. They are supposed to qualify the individual to address special needs, delineate special troubles, and give special advantages to those in special troubles. **Right here, I am saying that, when it comes to the kingdom of God, that whole way of thinking is nothing more than a deception.**

Let it be clear, the flesh cannot provide the resources necessary to do God's work. **What is required to minister comfort, or any other true need, to the saints of God, cannot be produced or distributed by man.** The wells men have dug are not deep enough

to produce the water of life. The houses they have built are not strong enough to withstand the storms of life. What men do may appear very impressive on the surface, but its worth is proved in dens of lions and furnaces of fire. **If the comfort men bring does not bring consolation in the flame and in the flood, it is nothing but a delusion – credentials or not.**

Of course, God is interested in credentials also – the ones that He alone

that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:15-16). And again, *"the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God"* (Col 2:19). The ministration of comfort especially fulfills this facet of spiritual life.

Let it be clear, the flesh cannot provide the resources necessary to do God's work. What is required to minister comfort, or any other true need, to the saints of God, cannot be produced or distributed by man. The wells men have dug are not deep enough to produce the water of life.

can give. Those who have really been "comforted by God" have received the credentials necessary to minister encouragement to others. **These are credentials that are honored in heaven.** That means the ministry of such an individual is empowered by God – made "able to comfort them which are in any trouble."

For the child of God to be truly comforted, they must be able to walk out of the lion's den and fiery furnace. If the time has come for them to leave the arena of conflict, they must be able to depart seeing Jesus, praying for their persecutors, and asking their Lord to receive their spirit (Acts 7:55-60).

Ministry through the body

In the New Covenant, Jesus ministers to His people through the church, which is His body. This is the ordinary manner in which resources are received. As it is written, *"even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by*

This approach to comforting sharply conflicts with human wisdom and the principles of psychiatry. While those methodologies are taught by men, effective comforting cannot be so produced. As in every other facet of Kingdom life, the Lord Jesus is always at the helm, determining the direction and effectiveness of His work – **all of it.** He, and He alone, is *"the Head of the body."* **"Comforting" is not a method, it is a ministry, and all "ministry" in the body of Christ is under the direct administration of the Lord** (1 Cor 12:4-7).

The ability to "minister," whether for comfort or any other purpose, is given to us by God. It is not the result of training or of any form of fleshly wisdom. In fact, those who are in Christ Jesus have received a mandate from the King. *"If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth"* (1 Pet 4:11). The purpose is *"that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion."*

ABOUNDING SUFFERINGS

“^{5a} For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us . . . ”

The Spirit continues to elaborate upon the role of sufferings in the Divine economy. **Afflictions have to do with us being reconciled to God, yet remaining in this world.** For the *“redeemed of the Lord”* (Psa 107:2), *“this present evil world”* is the **only** place suffering will be experienced. Because of this circumstance, and because of the relative brevity of life, *“sufferings”* can be experienced in unusually large measures. The Spirit will now unveil that there is a certain compensation for this that is also realized in this world.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

“For as the sufferings of Christ...”

Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed” (1 Pet 5:1).

Sufferings Related to Reconciliation

The latter two references apply uniquely to Christ’s sufferings FOR us, **not** in us. As it is written, *“Christ also suffered FOR us,” “Christ also hath once suffered FOR sins, “ and “Christ hath suffered FOR us”* (1 Pet 2:21; 3:18; 4:1). These are **not** the *“sufferings”* that *“abound in us.”* They were sufferings related to Jesus reconciling us to God – sufferings that were unjustly incurred by Jesus, yet were necessary for sin to be put away. **In this sense Christ’s sufferings culminated in His death.** Thus Peter writes, *“For Christ also hath*

Sufferings in which We Participate

There are *“sufferings of Christ”* in which we participate. **They do not have to do with us being reconciled.** They have no expiatory value. These are sufferings that are experienced **because** we are *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17). They are the **consequence** of faith, and the **result** of being *“strangers and pilgrims”* in the earth (1 Pet 2:11).

There are some *“sufferings”* that Jesus has *“left behind”* – sufferings to be experienced by us as we fellowship with Him. As it is written, *“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the church”* (Col 1:24). These are one of the means through which we have fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which God has called us (1 Cor 1:9).

These *“sufferings”* are an appointed means of conforming us to the death of Christ – **a death that involves being crucified to this world.** As it is written, *“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”* (Gal 6:14). That is, just as Jesus suffered and died, so, when we walk with Him, we suffer and die to the world. In this process the world becomes dead to us, and we become dead to the world. To put it another way, the world loses its interest in us, and we lose our interest in the world.

All of this postulates a very real fellowship with the Lord Jesus – a walk with Him in the light. As we walk by faith and live in the Spirit a distance forms between us and *“this present evil world.”* **That distance is intimidating to the world, and thus it reacts against us.** Suffering is the result. Not only is this distance a reality, it is something for which enlightened souls long. Paul said he *“suffered the loss of all things,”* considering them nothing more than repulsive *“dung.”* In providing the reason for this attitude, Paul mentioned Christ’s sufferings. *“That I may know Him, and the power of his resurrection, and the*

All of this postulates a very real fellowship with the Lord Jesus – a walk with Him in the light. As we walk by faith and live in the Spirit a distance forms between us and “this present evil world.” That distance is intimidating to the world, and thus it reacts against us.

Other versions read, *“the pain which Christ underwent,”* ^{BBE} *“Christ’s sufferings,”* ^{NAB} and *“suffer for Christ.”* ^{NLT}

The phrase *“sufferings of Christ”* is mentioned three times in Scripture.

- *“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ”* (2 Cor 1:5).
- *“Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow”* (1 Pet 1:11).
- *“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of*

once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18).

The sufferings related to reconciling men to God were **not experienced throughout Christ’s life**, but were concentrated during the time of His death. That is why Jesus spoke on this wise: *“And He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again”* (Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22).

These were the *“sufferings”* foretold by the prophets, and were related to the glorification of Christ which followed them (1 Pet 1:11).

The Role of Affliction and Comfort are powerfully expounded, showing the nature of salvation– by Given O. Blakely

fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (Phil 3:10). These are the “sufferings” of our text. They are said to be “**HIS sufferings**” because our identity with Him has caused them. **We are, in fact, experiencing the world’s attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Letting Your Light Shine Requires Dying with Jesus

If the life of Christ is to shine out through us, it is imperative that these sufferings be experienced. **No person can let their light “so shine” (Matt 5:16) who does not suffer with Christ!** This is in sharp contrast with the tendency of the modern church to adopt the manners of the world, looking like the world, acting like the world, and thinking like the world. Such patterns of behavior only confirm that such people are actually of the world, and are not “of Christ” at all.

Alluding to the necessity of these sufferings, Paul testified of his own experience. **“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be**

made manifest in our body” (2 Cor 4:10). Bearing in his body “**the dying of the Lord Jesus**” involved the “suffering” with which this text is dealing. The Spirit affirms this is “**so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body**”^{NIV} (2 Cor 4:10) – that is, while we are in this world and “**before men.**”

This deals a devastating blow to the entire concept of “seeker friendly” churches and services, a grand delusion of our time. **The truth of the matter is that this life and influence exerts its power in CONTRAST to the world, not in conformity to it.** The “**life of Jesus**” is made known when we are crucified to the world, and the world unto us. Any attempt to blur the sharp line that is drawn between the righteous and the unrighteous puts out the light of truth, and smothers the life of Jesus.

ABOUND IN US

“ . . . **abound in us . . .** ” Other versions read “**are ours in abundance,**”^{NASB} “**flow over into our lives,**”^{NIV} “**are abundant for us,**”^{NRSV} and “**undergo much more of the pain which Christ underwent.**”^{BBE}

The “**sufferings of Christ**” are not experienced in a fixed measure. Nor, indeed, are they confined to a certain period of our lives in this world. Such things as “**great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart**” (Rom 9:2), “**tears**” (2 Tim 1:4), “**fightings**” without and “**fears**” within (2 Cor 7:5), suffering “**trouble as an evil doer**” (2 Tim 2:9), and being “**persecuted for righteousness sake**” (Matt 5:10), can be experienced in extremely large measures. They can “**abound in us.**”

This measure is determined by extent of our faith. **The boundary of our suffering is fixed by how much we walk in the light and fellowship with Christ.** The more distant we are from Christ, the less these sufferings are experienced. To put it another way, **the closer we are to Christ, the greater the measure of these sufferings.**

The point of this text is expressed in the phrase that follows. It is this: that **the amount of consolation and encouragement that we receive from Christ is directly proportionate with the extent of our suffering with Him.**

ABOUNDING CONSOLATION

“^{5b} . . . **so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.**”

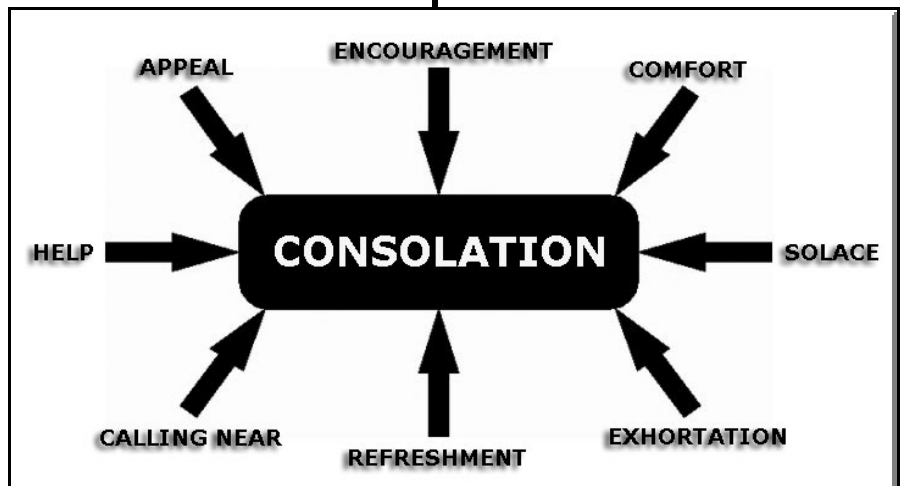
We will now see that extraordinary sufferings are matched by uncommon comfort, or consolation. **There is no such thing as ordinary supplies for extraordinary disciples.** Those who possess a robust faith will not be given meager supplies. The person who extends himself for the Lord Jesus will **not** experience “ordinary” benefits. **In the text before us, those who endure abounding measures of suffering are being distanced from mediocrity.** As surely as the world has heaped trouble upon them, so heaven will confer abundant consolation upon them.

OUR CONSOLATION

“ . . . **so our consolation . . .** ” Other versions read, “**our comfort,**”^{NASB} and “**our encouragement**”^{DARBY}

What is called “**comfort**” in verses three and four, is here called “**consolation.**” This is translated from the same word (παράκλησις), which has a larger meaning than any single English

word. This precise Greek word is translated in a variety of ways. The King James Version includes “**consolation**” (2 Cor 1:5; Phil 2:1), and “**exhortation**” (1 Thess 2:3). The New American Standard



Bible includes “*comfort*” (2 Cor 1:5), “*encouragement*” (Phil 2:1), and “*exhortation*” (1 Thess 2:3). The New International Version reads “*appeal*” (1 Thess 2:3).

There is an encouragement,

only a little with Jesus, we receive only a little consolation. If, by the grace of God, we participate extensively in His sufferings, we will participate extensively in His consolation, or comfort.

Divine encouragement is

saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14; 8:11). They have garnered their fees and scheduled future appointments to counsel the oppressed, but they have **not** made them well. Insightful laborers lament with Jeremiah: “*For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*” (Jer 8:21-22).

Well, there IS “*balm*” available to the saints, and there IS a physician in the house. **There is recovery of the health of God’s people to be realized.** But it has nothing whatsoever to do with a procedure, methodology, or supposed expertise in the human psyche. **Divine comfort is ministered in direct proportion to the measure of our sufferings with Christ.** Those who have suffered in their struggles with “*footmen*” will not receive the consolation intended for those who have contended with “*horses*” (Jer 12:5a). Those who have been wearied with “*the land of peace*” must not expect to receive the comfort administered to those who have faced “*the swelling of Jordan*” (Jer 12:b). It is “**JUST AS the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance,**” that “*our comfort is abundant through Christ.*”^{NASB}

A CONCLUSION

In view of this circumstance – namely, that the consolation ministered through Jesus is directly proportionate to the sufferings of Christ we experience – a certain conclusion is required. **Those who promote a shallow religion that yields little or no fellowship with Christ IN suffering, have actually robbed the people of comfort, encouragement, or consolation.** It is no different than if they had entered their persons and plundered what belongs to those in Christ Jesus.

This is not an innocent matter, and it cannot be overlooked. If what we preach and teach does not assist people in growing up into Christ in all things, and bringing them into a greater fellowship of Christ’s suffering, we are nothing more than a miserable deterrent to the work of the Lord. If that seems strong, the truth of the matter is

We are living in a time when the professed church is attempting to mitigate the friction brought on by affiliation with the Lord’s Christ. It adopts the manners of the world too easily, and courts its favor too readily. The language of the world is upon its lips, and the world’s values and manners are found among its constituency.

consolation, and comfort that comes from God. The word itself includes the ideas of help, encouragement, comfort, appeal, calling near, exhortation, solace, and refreshment. Hearts are lifted up, made strong, and refurbished when “*consolation*” is ministered. That is what enables the righteous to get up again, even though they have fallen “*seven times*” (Prov 24:16). When “*consolation*” comes in, discouragement must leave, for they cannot co-occupy the same dwelling. Faintheartedness and weariness are neutralized by “*consolation*” or “*comfort.*”

There is a sense in which “*consolation*” belongs to us: “**OUR consolation.**” **It is tailored for us,** and designed to make us stronger in the faith and less affected by the difficulties and vicissitudes of life.

ABOUNDETH BY CHRIST

“*. . . also aboundeth by Christ.*” Other versions read, “*is abundant through Christ,*”^{NASB} “*through Christ our comfort overflows,*”^{NIV} “*through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too,*”^{RSV} “*through Christ does our comfort become greater,*”^{BBE} and “*the more God will shower us with His comfort through Christ.*”^{NLT}

The Point of the Expression

The point of this marvelous expression is that **the consolation received from God through Christ is directly proportionate to our sufferings with Christ.** If we suffer

reserved for those who are being perfected in the crucible of suffering. If a person compromises with the world, thereby avoiding the afflictions and trials to which we have been “*appointed*” (1 Thess 3:3), there is a corresponding forfeiture of the consolation that is “*by Christ.*”

Right here one of the great weaknesses of the modern church is exposed. **We are living in a time when the professed church is attempting to mitigate the friction brought on by affiliation with the Lord’s Christ.** It adopts the manners of the world too easily, and courts its favor too readily. The language of the world is upon its lips, and the world’s values and manners are found among its constituency. While we might well mount a soap box and assert the impropriety of such an approach to life, it is enough to draw a single conclusion. **The elixir of Divine comfort has been withdrawn from those engaged in such an effort.** This, in my judgment, is what has given rise to the popularity of psychiatry and counseling. It is because there is such a high level of [as men would say] depression, frustration, and anxiety.

The condition created by the transgression of Israel has been duplicated in the professing church. The clerics and counseling professionals of the day have committed this transgression: “*They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly,*

that it is not strong enough. There remains in religious men an inveterate tendency to understate this matter.

Many of the religious professionals of our day are appropriately described by Jude as “clouds that are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 1:12).

They bring no resources to the saints, no advantage, and no comfort. They do not assist them in getting to the place of ultimate benefit, where consolation can abound. They are actually pinning the people to the earth, and thus stripping them of all of their power.

Make no mistake about this, those who move us closer to this

world also move us further from the consolation that is so sorely needed. Our associations with the people of God, and preaching and teaching to which we are exposed, is to move us more deeply into “*the fellowship of His sufferings.*” It is in that way, and only in that way, that we are positioned to receive the sweetness of consolation, and the refreshment of encouragement.

AFFLICTION, CONSOLATION AND SALVATION

“^{6a} **And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation . . .**”

Paul now engages in some holy reasoning, a spiritual art in which we all do well to gain expertise. **The people of God must learn to arrive at proper conclusions by means of holy reasoning. This is particularly true when we are speaking about suffering and affliction.** In my judgment there is altogether too much speculation and opinionated thought bantered about on this subject. There is an enormous tendency in philosophize about affliction. But for those who are standing in the blazing fire of trial, such approaches have no comfort-quotient. However, it is a great encouragement to hear “*words of truth and soberness*” on the subject (Acts 26:25). That is what is now set before us.

WHETHER WE BE AFFLICTED

“*And whether we be afflicted . . .*” Other versions read, “*Now if we are afflicted,*”^{NKJV} “*If we are distressed,*”^{NIV} “*If we are being afflicted,*”^{NRSV} “*But if we are troubled,*”^{BBE} “*But whether we are in tribulation,*”^{DARBY} “*So if we have hardships to undergo,*”^{NJB} and “*So when we are weighed down with troubles.*”^{NLT}

Behind this statement is the fact that our afflictions are being managed by God. That is what creates the “*IF*” factor. “*IF*” or “*whether*” does not refer to fate or to happenstance, but to “*the race that is set before us*” (Heb 12:1). That race may lead through fire and flood, through desert and pestilence—**but it is all under Divine direction.**

That is what is meant by, “*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*” (1 Cor 10:13). There is a very real sense in which we are “*appointed*” to sufferings. We should not, therefore be moved by them. As it is written, “*That no man should be*

encouragement,”^{DARBY} “*it is for your exhortation,*”^{DOUAY} and “*it is for your benefit.*”^{NLT}

What a marvelous bit of holy reasoning! Paul has already stated God comforts His saints in tribulation in order that they might be able to comfort others with that very comfort (verse 4). The

The only question that remains, therefore, is how we ought to respond to suffering, affliction, trial, and tribulation. How are we to think about such things, and what should be our conclusions

moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1 Thess 3:3). In another place it is written, “*we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22). And again, “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim 3:12).

The only question that remains, therefore, is how we ought to respond to suffering, affliction, trial, and tribulation. How are we to think about such things, and what should be our conclusions? That is what the Spirit now presents to us.

IT IS FOR YOUR CONSOLATION

“*. . . it is for your consolation. . .*” Other versions read, “*it is for your comfort,*”^{NASB/NIV} “*it is for your*

reason for our troubles, therefore, becomes obvious. **It is ultimately so that God may comfort others through our insightful testimony of having received comfort ourselves.** It is so we may be “*laborers together with God*” in the holy work of encouragement. This is precisely the point being made in the third chapter of First Corinthians. There Paul refers to the redeemed as God’s “*husbandry,*” or field, and “*building.*” The saints are like a tilled garden that is producing fragrance and fruit for the Lord Himself. They are like a building that is fitly framed together to be a habitation of God through the Spirit. The saints themselves are involved in that work. “*For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building*”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 3:9).

Part of the work of God is

comforting, for He is *“the God of all comfort”* (verse 3). He is the God *“that comforts those who are cast down”* (2 Cor 7:6). **Now, through His grace, He brings His people into that holy work. He causes them to pass through waters that will not overflow them, and fires that will not kindly upon them** (Isa 43:2). In that process He ministers comforts that are like seeds, to be sown by the victors upon His field, thereby ministering comfort and encouragement.

Bigger Than Us

This means that God’s interests are not confined to the circumstances of the individual. **No person should**

approach life as though he was the only one in the world, and their own interests were primary.

The affirmation of this text is most arresting. The REASON for affliction is for the *“consolation and salvation”* of the saints! Although this does apply to all suffering in all saints, let us focus on Paul’s suffering, which this text also does. **Behold what profit has come to the body of Christ because Paul suffered.** Consider what he has said about those sufferings, and how his words have encouraged and refreshed us (Acts 16:24; 20:24; 21:13; 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-33; Gal 6:17; Phil 2:17-18; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 2:2,14-16;

2 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:9-11; 4:16-17). Those details have sustained many a weary pilgrim. In view of these things, read our text again: *“And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation”*

AND SALVATION

“ . . . and salvation . . . ”

The salvation of men involves more than the forgiveness of sins. There are also required benefits that are forged in the furnace of trial, and dispensed in the word of our testimony. Salvation is very attainable, but is also complex. I will address this matter more fully in the exposition of the last part of this verse.

EFFECTUAL CONSOLATION

“ 6b . . . which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer . . . ”

In Christ Jesus, religion is lifted out of the domain of speculation and philosophy – spiritual

IT IS EFFECTUAL

“ . . . which is effectual . . . ” Other versions read, *“which is effective,”* NKJV *“which produces in you,”* NIV *“which you experience,”* NRSV *“which worketh in,”* ASV *“which takes effect,”* BBE *“wrought in the endurance,”* DARBY and *“which enables*

This refers to their *“consolation and salvation”* for which Paul was afflicted. **That holy duet was effective in accomplishing something of inestimable value within the Corinthians, and any one else who was a recipient of them.** This “something” is what Paul now briefly expounds. It is something that is absolutely essential.

ENDURING THE SAME SUFFERINGS

“ . . . in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer . . . ” Other versions read, *“for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer,”* NKJV *“in the patient endurance of . . . ”* NASB/NIV *“your quiet undergoing of the same troubles which we undergo,”* BBE *“wrought in the endurance of . . . ”* DARBY and *“which produces in you patient endurance.”* NIB

Rather than the afflictions of Paul driving him out of the ministry, or causing him to despair, **they were effective in causing others to effectively endure the same kind of sufferings – suffering for righteousness sake.**

Endurance is the Issue

Endurance is the real issue here. Only those who *“endure to the end”* will

In Christ Jesus, religion is lifted out of the domain of speculation and philosophy – spiritual abnormalities that are too often found in the body of Christ.

abnormalities that are too often found in the body of Christ. The spirit of the Athenians still flourishes in this world, constraining men to *“spend their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing”* (Acts 17:21). Myriad is the name of those relishing some new book, some new song, some new train of carnal thought that is garbed with religious pretense. **But this is not the realm into which we have been called.** The Kingdom of God’s dear Son is a realm of transcendent effectiveness.

you.” NAB **The insightful soul longs for things that are effective!** Who is the person who has not tasted the bitter dregs of the ineffectual and impotent. Who has not been nauseated within by the futility offered by the world – often the religious world? Such disappointments have no place in the body of Christ. **In Jesus we come into the domain of effectiveness, not dashed hopes.**

And what is it that is effective?

be saved, all contradicting theology notwithstanding (Matt 10:22). Endure what? Suffering, tribulation, afflictions, trial, hardship! Enduring involves standing after the storm is past. It is going into the Red Sea and coming out on the other side. It is coming out of the furnace after spending some time in it, and being able to come out of a den of hungry lions. Enduring is coming out of the wilderness of trial. **It is getting up after you have been stoned. It is getting up after you have been cast down. It is finishing the race. It is standing the test of time, and being ready to meet the Lord when He descends from heaven with a shout and the trump of God.**

Let us have done with ineffective religion! There is too much of it these days. There is too much fainting, quitting, and ceasing. **If what we have does not enable us to endure afflictions for Jesus' sake, it is not real and ought to be zealously discarded.** It makes little difference how aggressively men may promote ineffective religion, it is not to be bought or incorporated into our lives.

Today there are multitudes of people who are giving up like Demas, and going back and forsaking Jesus like the multitudes who were fed by Him. What is the reason for this? Why are backsliders, quitters, and people who cease having

allegiance to Christ so common in the church of our time? **It is because of ineffective religion! They cannot endure because what they have is not effective.** It is time for such meager and paltry religion to be thrown in the religion trash heap – discarded as the filthy rag that is really is (Isa 64:6).

The proof of spiritual validity is found in the endurance of the saints – when they are able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. It is when they are able to keep the faith and finish the race that has been placed before them. That is what confirms true effectiveness, and blessed are those in whom it is found.

COMFORT AND CONSOLATION AND SALVATION

“^{6c} . . . or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.”

Paul has already shown the powerful effects of the affliction he has endured. Now he will show us that the comfort he realized was equally effective.

WHETHER WE BE COMFORTED

“ . . . or whether we be comforted.”

This was the comfort that enabled Paul to continue running the race with patience. It was the consolation that ultimately enabled to him to fight a good fight, finish his course, and keep the faith (2 Tim 4:7). This was the encouragement that strengthened him to press the battle against the forces of darkness, even when he was in chains.

The comfort Paul received had the same effect a gigantic boulder has when cast into the ocean. It set off consecutive waves of effectiveness that dashed upon the shores of many ages. **Many a heart has been strengthened by the report of Paul's comfort, and of his indefatigable labors in the face of staggering dangers.**

Paul's comfort was for him, **but not for him alone.** His comfort becomes ours as we participate in *“the afflictions*

of Christ” (Col 1:24), and *“the afflictions of the Gospel”* (2 Tim 1:8).

YOUR CONSOLATION AND SALVATION

“ . . . it is for your consolation and salvation.”

The same purpose is served by comfort as was served by afflictions. That purpose is like a single river with two tributaries – *“consolation and salvation.”*

There are wounded souls left half dead upon the highway of life that require Samaritans to forfeit their own interests in order to help the afflicted. You may recall a Samaritan who used **his own “oil and wine”** for medication, placed the wounded man **“own beast,”** and gave the host money from **his own treasury** (Lk 10:34-35). The resources he had received were used to relieve an afflicted soul.

When the godly are comforted, the Lord is giving them oil and wine, a sturdy beast, and

some coins for their treasury. He is enabling to help the wounded by giving them what they themselves have received – comfort!

There is something to be seen here that is of unusual importance. Our salvation has been joined to comfort – consolation or encouragement. **The suggestion is that defeat is inevitable if we remain in a state of faintheartedness.** Under the Law, a person who was *“fainthearted”* or *“disheartened”* and weak, was not allowed to be in the army. The Law reads this war, *“And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, ‘What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart’”* (Deut 20:8).

When, among the saints, there is *“sorrow on the sea”* (Jer 49:23), danger obtains more power, causing faintheartedness. **It is imperative that God's people experience comfort,**

The same purpose is served by comfort as was served by afflictions. That purpose is like a single river with two tributaries – “consolation and salvation.”

consolation, encouragement, and refreshment. There is no promise that they will survive if this does not happen.

Confidence

Confidence is fueled by comfort, and it is not to be “cast away.” The Scriptures suggest that if we expect to receive the reward, we must maintain our confidence. “Cast not away therefore your confidence, **which hath great recompense of reward.** For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done

the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb 10:35-37).

Again, it is written that partaking of Christ hinges on the possession of confidence. “For we are made partakers of Christ, **if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end**” (Heb 3:14). **One will be hard pressed to find any confidence where comfort is not being ministered.**

Comfort is also a contributing to the people of God having love, accord, and a single mind. “If there be therefore any **consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind**” (Phil 2:1-2).

These realities are joined to “salvation,” which confirms its greatness, and the investments it requires.

STEADFAST HOPE

“^{7a} **And our hope of you is steadfast . . .**” Other versions read, “out hope for you is firmly grounded,”^{NASB} “our hope for you is unshaken,”^{NRSV} “our hope for you is certain,”^{BBE} “our hope for you is secure,”^{NJB} and “we are confident.”^{NLT}

What is it that causes a Kingdom laborer to have a steadfast hope concerning those among whom he has labored? Paul has a certain assurance of the outcome of their faith. It was a consistent persuasion that differed from his thoughts concerning the brethren in Galatia. Because they were backpedaling

to a system of Law, Paul said to the Galatians, “I stand in doubt of you” (Gal 4:20), and “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain” (Gal 4:11). But here Paul expresses an unusual confidence in the Corinthians.

Was this because they were part of the proper religious movement? Is it because they had been successful in their “evangelistic outreach?” Perhaps it was because of their community outreach, or their educational program, or youth program. Paul does not even suggest that because they have made a profession of

faith they are surely locked into the “saved” state, and will at last be in glory. Ah, to even suggest such things reveals the folly of them. Such transient successes can never be the basis of a “steadfast hope.”

There must be something more solid than that – something in which God and Christ are more evident. There must be some evidence of the abiding presence and blessing of the Lord – something that is more in keeping with Divine manners and God’s “eternal purpose.”

PARTAKERS OF SUFFERING AND CONSOLATION

“^{7b} . . . **knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.**”

Paul now gives the reason for his “steadfast hope.” It will be apparent that the foundation of his confidence is kingdom verities, and not things that are temporal and seen with the eye. **Ultimately, confidence must be in God.** Such surety is sparked by things that God does – things He has revealed that He does.

KNOWING

“ . . . *knowing* . . . ” The area of knowledge now addressed has nothing whatsoever to do with scholarship, familiarity with worldly principles, or the

assessments of men. This is spiritual knowledge, elsewhere referred to as “*the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*” (Col 1:9). It is found where the word of Christ is dwelling richly within (Col 3:16) and where God Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ are known (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20).

A person who is in fellowship with Christ Jesus has access to “*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*” **These are hidden from the flesh and those who walk in it, being confined to Christ Himself** (Col 2:3).

The person who truly “*knows*” is conversant with kingdom realities. He is

able to handle the Word of God aright (2 Tim 2:15), and correlate what is “*written*” with circumstance.

It is interesting to note that the clause “*knowing that*” is not found in the Old Covenant Scriptures (Genesis through Malachi). The NIV has a single instance where this expression is found. It is Job 31:21: “*if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court*” (Job 31:21). Other versions render that clause “*I saw.*” The NRSV version also gives one instance of the phrase “*knowing that.*” It is Proverbs 7:23: “*until an arrow pierces its entrails. He is like a bird rushing into a snare, not knowing that it will cost him his life*” (Prov 7:23). Other versions read

"knoweth not."

These two isolated instances, taken from more modern versions, are not even speaking in the manner of our text. They are both addressing earthly circumstances and have nothing whatsoever to do with eternal relationships.

With the advent of Jesus Christ and the commencement of "the day of salvation," knowledge has been raised to a new level. Saints know things that were never known

"sufferings" of reference are *"the sufferings of Christ,"* mentioned in verse five.

Elsewhere this is referred to as *"suffering with"* Christ (Rom 8:17). It is also the same as suffering *"for His sake,"* which is a privilege that is *"given"* to us (Phil 1:29). From yet another vantage point, it is *"the fellowship of His sufferings"* (Phil 3:10), where we walk, as it were, through the furnace and through the flood **with Him.**

This is when we endure the

This is when we endure the opposition of the world because of our faith. It is when we experience the resistance of the flesh, and the presence of another law that wars against the law of our minds. This is suffering that results from passing through the "narrow" way that chaffs the flesh and will not permit the passage of the baggage and weights experienced in this world.

before, because they have access to understanding that was never before available (Rom 5:3; 6:9; 2 Cor 1:7; 4:14; 5:8; Gal 2:16; Eph 6:8; Colo 3:24; 2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:11; James 3:1; 1 Pet 3:9; 5:9).

Behold the rich morsel of knowledge that is now placed before us. It has to do with a Kingdom principle that cannot be violated.

AS YOU ARE PARTAKERS OF THE SUFFERING

" . . . that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, . . . " Other versions read, *"sharers of our sufferings,"*^{NASB} *"as you take part in the troubles."*^{BBE}

Some of the versions can be a little misleading, as those which read *"our sufferings."* The idea is that the Corinthians were sharing in the common *"sufferings of Christ,"* not merely the sufferings of Paul. The word *"partakers"* means sharing or participating in. The

opposition of the world because of our faith. It is when we experience the resistance of the flesh, and the presence of another law that wars against the law of our minds. This is suffering that results from passing through the *"narrow"* way that chaffs the flesh and will not permit the passage of the baggage and weights experienced in this world.

Now, what is there about this suffering that has gendered confidence in Paul? It is nothing less than his acquaintance with the manner of the kingdom.

SO SHALL YE BE ALSO OF THE CONSOLATION

" . . . so shall ye be also of the consolation." Other versions read, *"so also you will partake of the consolation,"*^{NKJV} *"so also you are sharers in the comfort,"*^{NASB} *"so you will take part in the comfort,"*^{BBE} and *"you will also share God's comfort."*^{NLT}

Here is something that cannot possibly fail of fulfillment. **Those who share in Christ's suffering will also share in His consolation or comfort.** They will be encouraged by the Lord. They will *"renew their strength"* (Isa 40:31). They will have *"joy in the morning"* (Psa 30:5). They will be caused to triumph (2 Cor 2:14). They will *"doubtless come rejoicing"* (Psa 126:6). **They will share in the consolation!**

Make no mistake about this, and do not allow the tempter to dissuade you of this truth! *"If we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him"* (2 Tim 2:12). In this world, the Lord will comfort and nourish you, preparing you a refreshing table in *"the presence"* of your enemies (Psa 23:5). In the world to come, He will *"bruise Satan"* under your feet, and give you *"power over the nations"* (Rom 16:20; Rev 2:26). **You will share in the consolation!**

Some sweet elixir of comfort will be sent from heaven to you in your trial. It may be delivered by a Titus, who refreshed Paul in prison (2 Cor 7:6). It may come through the hands of spiritual barbarians who will show you *"no little kindness"* (Acts 28:2). It may come from the hands of an obscure Onesiphorous, who often refreshed Paul, and was not ashamed of his chain (2 Tim 1:16). But Jesus will get the comfort to you. **He will see to it that you are encouraged - in a timely and effective manner.**

Your comfort may come through a fellow worker, as when *"the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith"* (Isa 41:7). It may come in the quietness of your own chambers as you, like David, are able to encourage yourself in the Lord (1 Sam 30:6). It may come from holy men of God, who, like Josiah, *"encouraged"* the priests *"in the service of the Lord"* (2 Chron 35:2). But it will come. **They will share in the consolation!**

Let us be bold to remind one another of this marvelous provision: comfort and encouragement for those who suffer. Let us speak confidently about this matter, knowing this is the will of the Lord, reflecting the manner in which He governs His Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

In these days, it is not popular to speak of suffering for Christ, or with Christ. It does not seem to fit in with the institutional agenda's of the day. It is more fashionable to speak of prosperity, burgeoning success, and exponential growth – all of which are passing away. Men and women are being taught to live with a cloud of delusion over their heads. When trouble comes their way it contradicts what they have been taught about living for the Lord. **Compounding the problem they not only experience inner pain, but confusion as well – which is often even more disconcerting.**

We are living during a shift of religious emphasis, when impressions and accommodations to the ungodly are in vogue. In such an atmosphere, suffering is perceived as having no real advantage. Therefore we hear of people being “angry with God,” frustrated, and depressed. Outbursts of “Why is this happening to me” are erupting within the churches, and suave trained counselors are sent forward to provide weak and insipid answers – at a cost.

This is the age of Christian workshops and “how-to” books, that have taken the place of preaching, exhortation, and comfort. It is all an enormously feeble effort to help people feel better about themselves, and be more confident in the ability and expectations of the institution.

THE REMNANT

However, there is a remnant within the land. **There is a nucleus of informed saints that are scattered among the churches.** These are people who confess they are “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Heb 13:14). They are not at home in this world, for they are holding primary citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20-21). These are the people who have turned from their former lives “*to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven*” (1 Thess 1:10). They have found “*another law*” within themselves, waging relentless war against the law of their minds (Rom 7:23).

This body of people knows the world cannot receive them, so they are not surprised when they are hated (John 7:7; 15:18), and set forth as “*the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things*” (1 Cor 4:13). They have learned to “*hate evil*” as well love the Lord (Psa 97:10), and “*abhor that which is evil*” as well as “*cleave to that which is good*” (Rom 12:9). When the world speaks well of them, they are put into the posture of “*beware*,” for they know that is not a good sign (Lk 6:26).

These are the ones who have invariably and aggressively “*crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*” (Gal 5:24). They “*worship God in the Spirit*,

fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1). They are striving to “*be holy*,” for their Lord is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). **They are sanctifying the Lord Jesus in their hearts, and preparing themselves to give an answer to every man that asks a reason for the hope that is within them** (1 Pet 3:15).

To them, the promises of God are “*exceeding great and precious*” (2 Pet 1:4). Because they believe, Jesus is “*precious*” to them (1 Pet 2:7). Their faith is “*precious*” because they have obtained it from God (2 Pet 1:1). To them, the Word God is the “*joy and rejoicing*” of their heart, for they are called by the name of the Lord of hosts (Jer 15:16).

Because of their posture in this world, this remnant is partaking of the sufferings of Christ. The things that cause the carnal religious crowd to leap for joy cause them to weep for sorrow. The church fads of the day are like dust in their eyes and alum in their mouths. The fancy hoopla that parades itself as praise has no attraction to them.

rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). They are pressing “*toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:1), and have counted “*all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*” their Lord (Phil 3:8). They “*love one another*,” “*prefer one another*,” and find it “*good and pleasant*” to dwell together in unity (1 Thess 4:9; Rom 12:10; Psa 133:1). Throughout the ages, these have been the people who, in spite of the circumstances and times, “*spake often one with another*” (Mal 3:16).

These are the people who have taken seriously the Divine mandate to cleanse themselves “*of all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the*

They know the Lord, recognize His voice, and follow Him wherever He leads (John 10:4-5, 27).

Because of their posture in this world, this remnant is partaking of the sufferings of Christ. The things that cause the carnal religious crowd to leap for joy cause them to weep for sorrow. The church fads of the day are like dust in their eyes and alum in their mouths. The fancy hoopla that parades itself as praise has no attraction to them. It is too frothy, too shallow, and too fleeting. It only brings more suffering to them.

These people seem to have more trouble with church boards and religious institutions. They find it

difficult to adjust to fewer and shorter meetings, more carnal outings, and dominance by the young and uniformed. They cannot bring themselves to forget the great hymns of the church which have assisted them in coming through many fires and floods. Their spirit will not acquiesce to religious incantations and repetitions that are popular with the

spiritually ignorant. **Social dialogs from pulpits do not please them, and humorous little anecdotes prove to be meager fare for them, for they are hungry and thirsty for righteousness.**

When this remnant hears of the social trends of the times, it hurts them

more. When they see sin exalted, they cannot easily put it from their minds. All of this makes them a easy target for the godless. They suffer more. They cry more. They lament more. This world with all of its manners causes groans to emit from their spirit. These are the fraternity of sufferers, and they are being prepared to reign with Jesus.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 6/11/2004. In this session, we will continue our series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The third lesson will cover verses eight through ten of the first chapter: **"DIVINE DELIVERANCE."** Deliverance is a fundamental aspect of salvation – not only our initial deliverance from the power of darkness, but ongoing deliverance. This session will deal with the marvelous scope of that deliverance. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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