

EPIPHANY 6 – 2009

2nd Corinthians 1: 3 - 7

Nine times in this translation – actually ten times in the original Greek – we see the noun or verb ‘comfort’ in these five verses. In addition, the word ‘mercies, compassions’ appears once. These words ‘comfort’ and ‘compassions’ oppose the words ‘trouble’ and ‘suffering’. Clearly God’s mercies and comfort (encouragement) come out on top, win the day!

Last week we saw a man named Job undergo awful trouble and terrible suffering. Three friends and a fourth person offered Job precious little comfort. Job needed comfort.

These words assure us God is the Father of mercies and the God of every comfort. These words also encourage us and show us how to pass God’s comfort on to other people. There is no reason for us ever to be Job’s kind of friends.

We Are Comforted in Order to Comfort Others.

All of us need comfort! Why? Because as Christians we always endure trouble. And we undergo trouble, tribulation, and difficulty because we currently live in a hostile environment. That is, we live in our flesh. It is thoroughly infected with sin. So, from within us, out of our hearts, come strong temptations and urges to sin. Sin is always harmful, destructive. And we live in this world, a world of sinners, a world in rebellion against the living God, so a dying world, a world which Satan treats like abused slaves, being an awful and cruel master.

Looked at from a different direction we followers of Jesus endure the sufferings of Christ. That means we suffer like our Savior. Saint Paul in Philippians says such suffering is a joy and privilege because it assures us that we are connected with our Savior in a kind of fellowship with Him. After all, the world and Satan hated Jesus, opposed Jesus, lied about Jesus, wanted to be rid of Him. Jesus Himself tells us that if they treated Him – our Lord and King – that way, we should fully expect – as His servants – to be treated likewise.

Remember again how Saint Paul told the Galatian Christians that it is necessary to go through many troubles to enter the kingdom of God.

This is suffering for what is good. It is not penalty for doing wrong, for being criminals, for violating God’s Laws. It is suffering for being different from the world, for being something new in Christ. Since a Christian is a person united to Jesus by faith, every believer shows in such suffering connected to Jesus.

This is why we need to be comforted and why we need to comfort other people.

Let us know for sure and rest in the confidence that God comforts His people in all, in every, trouble. He is the Father of mercies (compassions). It is plural in the original. Mercy is love. It is love in response to misery. Sinners, by nature, are in a terrible situation. They are slaves to, addicts to sin. Sin kills and destroys and condemns. To that the heavenly Father reacted with mercy. The Father is merciful. He offers mercy. That is His characteristic.

He is also the God of every comfort. As continuous as is trouble, so continuous is God’s comfort. His comfort is always there.

Jesus is God in the flesh. He is God the Son of God the Father with the Holy Spirit, true God. Yet, because He made Himself a full, true man, He also calls God the Father His God. But because Jesus lived His whole life and died and rose again for us sinners, Jesus calls God the Father also our God and Father. Because of Jesus, the Father calls Himself our Father and names us His children.

God comforts all who rely on Him. He loves to comfort them and that is His characteristic!

God comforts us with His strong Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News of forgiveness to us because of Jesus' work on our behalf. God is almighty and He has placed all His strength into that Gospel to save us. He does this because He loves us and He loves us purely by grace. That means His love, mercy, forgiveness, and every blessing is offered every sinner as a free gift for Jesus' sake who paid for it with His life. Forgiveness of all sin gives us peace, peace of conscience, peace with God, rest of soul forever. And this promises us resurrection from death, ascension to the glorious, eternal, joyous life of heaven with our Savior. All of this is a great comfort and encouragement to us in the face of every trouble and all suffering.

God may take us out of the trouble and suffering or take the trouble and suffering away from us. He may strengthen us to be able to endure the suffering. He often even brings various good things out of the troubles, like offering us new opportunities to share the Gospel with more people, even with those who may be persecuting us. God may be teaching us not to rely on ourselves but to depend on God alone for our help. God may show us the fruits of repentance in others to our great joy.

God's goal always is people's comfort and salvation. Paul knew that. So, even when Saint Paul suffered just because he was bringing the Good News of Jesus' forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation to the Corinthians or to people some place else, the Apostle was happy because they were then receiving God's comforting forgiveness and promise of eternal life, peace, joy, and glory.

God's Law brought about a godly sorrow in the Corinthian Christians, a godly sorrow that led them to repentance which led to their salvation. That greatly encouraged Paul, comforted him. And when God comforted Paul in some hard or dangerous situation, Paul was able then to share that comfort with the Christians to comfort them as they shared in the sufferings of Christ.

This is how we can comfort one another, too, offering one another, through God's Word, God's forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, resurrection, ascension, eternal life, inheriting all of Jesus' blessings as co-heirs with Him. And we can carry these blessed things to all other people still terrorized and abused by the devil and the unbelieving world, freeing them into God's family, into rebirth, renewal, and peace. We gladly endure ridicule as we do this because more people will be comforted by the Father of mercies and the God of every comfort. This is our and their sure hope. Amen.