

1/11/26

The Church as a Fellowship of Suffering

2 Corinthians 1:1–11

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:1–11

Sermon Introduction

Last week, John Marc opened our study in 2 Corinthians with an introductory sermon, highlighting four defining realities of our life in Christ. First, we are saints, who are saved by God's grace and set apart for His glory.

Second, we are sinners, meaning that though have been transformed by the gospel, we are still being sanctified and continue to battle sin as we grow in Christ. Third, we are spokesmen, that means that having been reconciled to God, we are now His ambassadors, proclaiming Christ and the gospel to those around us.

And fourth, as John Marc reminded us during communion, we are also sufferers. The passage before us this morning has this reality of suffering clearly in view.

I want to share a quote I have found comforting. Jerry Bridges writes, **“Every adversity that comes across our path, whether large or small, is intended to help us grow in some way. If it were not beneficial, God would not allow it or send it. ‘For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men’ (Lamentations 3:33). God does not delight in our sufferings. He brings only that which is necessary, but He does not shrink from that which will help us grow.”**

Suffering is a difficult reality of the Christian life. Yet the beauty of our God is that He gives us real comfort. This comfort enables us to endure, to hope, and to extend His comfort and hope to others who are suffering as well.

Main Point: In 2 Corinthians 1:1–11, we see four key ways God comforts His people in suffering, so that we as a church would be comforted and extend His comfort to one another.

Outline:

I. The Comfort of the Gospel in our Suffering (1–2)

II. The Comfort of God's Character in Our Suffering (3–4)

III. The Comfort of Fellowship in Our Suffering (5–7)

IV. The Comfort of Hope and Prayer in Our Suffering (8–11)

My prayer this week has been that the Lord would use this passage to minister His comfort to those within our church family who are suffering, and that He would continue to grow us as a church in our ability to lovingly comfort and care for one another.

I. The Comfort of the Gospel in our Suffering (1–2)

The letter begins with a standard greeting. Look at verse 1, it reads, **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.”**

As we see here, as in most Paul’s letters, he identifies himself as **an apostle of Christ Jesus**. In our study of 1 Corinthians, John Marc covered the qualifications that biblically constituted an apostle. You can see his sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:20–31 entitled “We’re Interdependent not Independent.”

Here Paul adds the qualifier that his apostleship is **by the will of God**. He made it clear that he was not ordained by men, nor was he an apostle by his own will. Rather, his authority as an apostle came directly from Christ after his conversion on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:15–16).

As John Marc noted last week, this detail is significant considering the context of this letter. By the time this letter was written, false apostles had crept into the church and were trying to destroy Paul’s credibility, discredit his ministry, and defy his authority.

In saying that his apostleship was **by the will of God** he is reminding the church, and his opponents, that to reject his authority as an apostle is to ultimately reject the authority of God.

Paul also notes that **Timothy** is with him, calling him **our brother** to emphasize the common bond of faith and ministry that he shared with Timothy, and that the Corinthians shared as well.

He then identifies the recipients of the letter: **“To the church of God which is at Corinth.”** This wording reminds them that they do not belong to any particular leader or person. The church belongs to God; it is His possession (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4).

Then he states: **“with all the saints who are throughout Achaia.”** The Corinthians, being a spiritual prideful bunch, need to be reminded that they were part of the wider family of God spread throughout all Achaia.

We now come to the introductory blessing in verse 2 **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

It has been said that God’s **grace** is His love in action. God’s Grace is His favor. It is His care. It is His gracious help that He gives to undeserving people. God’s grace is evident in His repeated acts of love for us, its demonstrated in His faithful daily provision, and its experienced the sustaining strength and ability He gives us each day.

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In its fullest sense, God's grace encompasses all the benefits of our salvation, from our conversion all the way to our final glorification. It is His grace in our salvation that ultimately leads to **peace**.

The word **peace** is rooted in the Hebrew word *shalom*. It carries the idea of wholeness, completeness, and total overall well-being. It speaks of having harmony with God, this restored relationship, and a true rest felt in the soul that comes from having reconciliation with Him.

This grace and peace comes first **from God our Father**. Believer, you should meditate on the truth that God is your Father. Through faith and repentance in Christ, you have been adopted as God's child (Galatians 3:26; 4:4–6).

You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to you that you belong to Him, and this leads you to cry out, "Abba! Father!" in both moments of joy and moments of pain (Romans 8:15–16).

God is your Father who delights to give you good gifts when you ask (Matthew 7:11, cf. Luke 11:13). It's this glorious reality that moved the apostle John to write, "**See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God...**" or as another translation puts it, "**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.**" (1 John 3:1).

And if that were not enough, **Ephesians 1:4–5** tells us that God "**chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.**"

We ought to be encouraged, comforted, and filled with awe that the sovereign God of the universe is our Father.

Second, it is a great comfort that this grace and peace also come from our **Lord Jesus Christ**. He is not our Lord simply because He is the second person of the Triune God and the sovereign Ruler over all things. To be sure, that is true and that definitely makes Him Lord.

He is our Lord to us because He ransomed us and purchased us with His own blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:9). We belong to Him. He is our Savior (Luke 2:11); He is the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

He is our Good Shepherd who knows us, leads us, and lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11, 14). He is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

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He is our life (Colossians 3:4), our peace (Ephesians 2:14), and our great High Priest who always lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:25).

He is our Bridegroom (Mark 2:19; Revelation 19:7), our Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:6), and our friend (John 15:15). He is our Lord and that is one of the most incredible privileges a person can have.

The opening blessing here functions as an opening prayer. Paul did not merely want the Corinthians to understand the facts of God's grace and peace in the gospel. He wanted them to experience these gospel realities. To rest in the assurance of God's love and to know the peace that belongs to them in Christ.

In short, Paul wanted the gospel to comfort their hearts. This leads me to the most important part of the sermon.

If you are here this morning and you have not yet repented of your sins and turned to Jesus Christ in faith, the good news is, God's grace and peace can be yours. You see, God, in His grace, sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to live the life you could not live. In order to be right with God you need a perfect righteousness. Christ is the only One who has lived a perfect sinless life.

Not only that but Christ died the death you deserved. On the cross, Jesus bore the full penalty for sin, the full wrath of God against the wickedness and evil that we committed. You not only need a perfect righteousness, but you also need your sin penalty paid. Jesus is the only One who had paid that penalty in full.

And to prove that Jesus accomplished both these things, He rose again from the grave and He offers His life and death as a substitute in your place for your forgiveness, your reconciliation with God, and your new life in Him.

This grace is not earned, and this peace cannot be achieved any other way. It is only received as a gift by turning from your sin and placing your trust fully in Christ.

God stands ready to forgive you, to adopt you, to restore you, and to give you peace you with Himself.

So, I plead with you this morning, don't harden your heart. Don't put this off for another time. Repent of your sins and turn to Jesus Christ in faith. Look to Him and cling to Him for refuge, forgiveness, and life.

If you do, the grace and peace spoken of in this opening blessing will be yours. And there is no greater comfort, no greater hope, and no greater joy than that.

And so we see, the church is formed by God's grace and peace, but it is shaped by suffering.

II. The Comfort of God's Character in Our Suffering (3–4)

In these verses, Paul directs our attention to the ultimate source of our comfort, and he does so in the form of praise. Look with me at verses 3–4: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction...”**

What stands out about these words is that Paul writes them as a man who has endured immense suffering (vv. 8–9; cf. 11:23–29). Yet in the midst of that suffering, the comfort Paul received from God so far outweighed the pain he endured that it moved him to begin this letter not with complaint, not with self-pity, not with despair, but with praise.

This praise immediately points to the ultimate source of all our comfort: God. We see here four aspects of the God's character revealed, and each of them are given for our comfort.

First, God as the **God... of our Lord Jesus Christ**. This draws out Jesus' humanity. In the incarnation, Jesus took on a human flesh, and as the perfect man, He trusted, obeyed, and relied on God perfectly. God was His God.

This aspect of God's character communicates to us His power and dependability. Our God is one true God. He is the all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere-present God who made everything. He is perfectly good, infinitely wise, and completely sovereign.

He orchestrates all things for His glory and the good of His people. And in the same way that Jesus relied on God in His earthly ministry, we can rely on Him as well. This is a comfort for us.

Second, God as the **“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This points to Jesus' deity. Jesus is the Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are co-equal, co-eternal, and each one is fully God, and together they comprise the one Triune God.

This aspect of God's character points us to the fact that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The Father has demonstrated His love for us in sending Christ (Romans 5:8).

As 1 John 4:9–10 puts it, **“By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.”**

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Third, God is the **“Father of mercies.”** This highlights God’s tender heart toward His children. He is full of compassion, slow to anger, and provides relief to the afflicted. He delights to draw near to the suffering and the broken hearted (Psalm 34:18).

His compassionate heart moves Him to action, and He ministers mercy to His children. He is the Father who sees our pain, who hears our cries, and responds with steadfast love and care.

Fourth, God is the **“God of all comfort.”** Not only does He act with mercy with our afflictions, but He also actively comforts us. There is a reason why the psalmists would constantly call God their Rock, their Fortress, their Shield, their Refuge, for in Him they found real comfort, real security, real encouragement, and real strength.

And in this way, it is crucial for us to understand that our comfort does not depend on what God does or does not do to change our circumstances. All comfort flows from who He is, and our experience of that comfort is found in our closeness and communion with Him.

With these four aspects of God’s character presented, we must understand that in suffering, our hearts must be rooted in truth, they must be rooted in right theology, they must be tethered to the God of all comfort, not focused on the overwhelming details of our circumstances.

And notice the way this description of God ends: He is the One **“who comforts us in all our affliction.”** His comfort is real, it is palpable, it is available, and sufficient for every trial, every sorrow, every fear, every season, and every circumstance.

Illustration of Not Getting the TMS Job.

It is no wonder why this letter opens with praise, for the God of all comfort is worthy of all honor, all glory, all thanksgiving, and all praise.

But these verses don’t stop with praise. After highlighting God as the source of all comfort, he immediately points to the purpose of our suffering and the comfort we receive. Look at the second part of verse 4: **“so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”**

Notice the sequence: our suffering leads to our comfort, which then leads to ministry. The comfort we experience from God is not meant to end with us. It is a gift of God’s grace given to equip us so that we would share the same love, mercy, and compassion to others in their suffering.

This sequence of suffering and being comforted by God to comfort others blends into the next point which is...

III. The Comfort of Fellowship in Our Suffering (5–7)

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Our comfort in suffering is drawn from the gospel and from God Himself, but Paul now shows us that we also draw real and meaningful comfort from our fellowship with Christ and with one another.

Look at verse 5 with me: **“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”**

First, this verse sets proper expectations for the Christian life. It says, **“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance.”** As Christians we should expect suffering in this life.

We suffer for several reasons. We suffer because we live in a fallen world under the curse of sin, and sickness, decay, disaster, and death. We also suffer because we are still sinners and sometimes suffer the painful consequences of our sinful own choices.

We also suffer because we are sinned against by others, and experience harm or injustice that we did not cause. But suffering is also part of the Christian life because it is one of the ways we share in our fellowship with Christ.

Jesus told the disciples, **“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”** (John 15:20).

Paul told Timothy, **“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (2 Timothy 3:12).

Peter told the church **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing...”** (1 Peter 4:12–13).

One gracious purpose of our suffering is that we would come to know Christ more by sharing in His sufferings. The experience of suffering for His name and the sake of the gospel causes us to treasure more Christ and His own suffering for us.

So, as we suffer for Christ, we are drawn into a deeper fellowship with Christ. The verse continues, **“so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”** As believers our comfort doesn’t come from the absence of suffering, but by the presence of Christ in the midst of it.

As our suffering intensifies, so too should the intensity of our clinging to Him. And this intensifies our experience of His sustaining grace, His comfort, and His peace.

“His cross is the sweetest burden that ever I bare; it is such a burden as wings are to a bird, or sails are to a ship, to carry me forward to my [Savior].” – Samuel Rutherford

Through suffering, the truths of the gospel move from intellectual concepts to lived out realities, and Christ becomes not only our Savior in the abstract, but our living, breathing, actual Savior who provides us with comfort and strength.

But suffering doesn't just produce fellowship with Christ, the verse says: **"The sufferings of Christ are OURS in abundance, so also OUR comfort is abundant through Christ."** This reminds us that suffering and comfort are shared experiences among believers.

Our comfort in suffering comes through the fellowship of suffering that we share in the family of God. As we suffer together, pray for one another, and bear one another's burdens, the comfort of Christ is ministered throughout His body.

Christ uses His people to comfort through physical presence, sharing comforting words, and prayers. Living in a hyper individualized society, it is good for us to remind ourselves that not only we belong to Christ, but in Him we also belong to one another.

Look at verses 6–7, Paul continues **"But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort."**

Here Paul explains that if he and his fellow laborers suffer as they bring the gospel to Corinth and labor among the church, that suffering is **"for their comfort and salvation."** And if God comforts Paul in the midst of that suffering, it is for their comfort and endurance.

Again, there is a direct and inseparable connection between suffering, comfort, and ministry. Because believers are united in Christ (one Lord, on faith, one baptism, one body, one family, one people redeemed by the gospel) then what affects one member affects the whole body.

There is a shared participation in both suffering and comfort, rooted in our shared union with Christ. You could almost say that one must lead to the other. Suffering leads us to receive comfort from God, and that comfort must overflow into the lives of others.

We are meant to weep together, to be comforted together, to be strengthened together, and to endure together. This is why being active part of the church family matters so much. Isolation magnifies our suffering, but gospel-shaped fellowship multiplies our comfort in suffering.

Personal testimony of shared fellowship of suffering and comfort in the church.

The gospel is our comfort, God is our comfort, fellowship with Christ and one another is our comfort, but there is more in our next last point...

IV. The Comfort of Hope and Prayer in Our Suffering (8–11)

Let's look at verses 8–11: **“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope.”**

Here Paul draws on his own experience of suffering to show that comfort in suffering comes from our resurrection hope. Notice his description **“we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves.”**

Paul believed death was inevitable. This is severe. I know some in this room have suffered in life-or-death situations, but not all of us have. We can only imagine how intense this must have been. This is a level of complete and total hopelessness and despair.

Yet Paul says God allowed that level of suffering, **“so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”** Through suffering Paul learned in a greater capacity what it was to not trust in himself and trust in God and the hope of the resurrection.

Through suffering, Paul was stripped of every false confidence and comfort until only one remained. The comfort of our eternal glory in Christ. resurrection hope became his anchor.

This comfort isn't just for Paul. God has already given us the ultimate deliverance in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because Christ has been raised, we can have the comfort of hope in our suffering, even suffering to the point of death. Resurrection hope strengthens us to endure what we could never endure on our own.

But even further Paul points us the comfort we receive in suffering from prayer: **“And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.”**

We should never discount the power of prayer. Paul says the Corinthians were “helping” him through their prayers. God ordains prayer as a real means by which He strengthens and comforts His people through suffering. Not only our prayers, but the prayers of others sustain us when we are weak.

And notice the result: prayer leads to thanksgiving. As God answers prayer, praise multiplies. Many voices give thanks because many voices interceded. God receives greater glory as His people depend on Him together.

God uses suffering to cultivate dependence. He uses suffering to produce more prayer. He uses despair to anchor hope in resurrection power. And through it all, He draws His people into greater trust, stronger fellowship, and more heartfelt praise. And this leads to our comfort.

Conclusion:

As we conclude this sermon and I want to reiterate that all our comfort comes from the God of all comfort and we have access to it because of our Savior Jesus Christ. He was the Man of Sorrows, who came to this fallen world and experienced suffering for us.

Jesus is not removed from our pain. He was rejected, suffered injustice, brought to physical agony, and bore the weight of our sin on the cross. He suffered to the greatest possible degree.

Yet, as He hung on that bloody cross the Father was accomplishing His gracious purpose. The cross tells us that suffering is never meaningless for God's people.

And the story does not end at the cross. The resurrection declares that suffering does not have the final word. Christ was raised in power, and because He lives, we have incredible hope in our suffering. Paul says we share in Christ's sufferings, but we also share in His comfort. We can be assured that God will sustain us now and raise us to glory in the end.

This is why the church can be a true fellowship of suffering. We do not suffer alone, and we do not suffer without hope. We comfort one another with the comfort we ourselves have received from our crucified and risen Savior. And as we do, the watching world sees a community of believers that grieves honestly, loves deeply, prays faithfully, and hopes confidently.

So, not if but when suffering comes let us look to Christ and let us comfort one another.

Let's pray.

Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace,¹⁷ comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.” Amen.