

Fact Sheet for “Affliction and Comfort”

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

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Paul has had a lot of history with the Corinthians. Here is a thumbnail.

Paul first came to Corinth in the spring of A.D. 51 and stayed there for one and one-half years.

In the fall of A.D. 52 he sailed to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. They remained there while Paul continued on to Jerusalem. Meanwhile Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos and instructed him. Apollos then went to Corinth to minister. (Acts 18:18-28)

While Apollos ministered in Corinth (Acts 19:1) Paul returned to Ephesus in the fall of A.D. 53 and remained there two and one-half years (Acts 19). While there he likely wrote a letter to the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-11) which is now lost.

1 Corinthians is actually the second letter we know of that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He had learned of divisions within the church there (1 Corinthians 1:11-12).

Paul had been visited by some of the church (1 Corinthians 16:17) who likely brought him similar news of some issues and questions dividing the church. 1 Corinthians was written to address these.

But the problems in the Corinthian church were still not resolved. It was possible that Timothy brought this news to Paul (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10). So Paul decided to pay the Corinthians a second visit. Apparently this was the “painful visit” Paul referred to (2 Corinthians 2:1).

One of the things Paul dealt with on this visit was the actions of one of their men (2 Corinthians 2:5; 7:12).

After Paul returned to Ephesus he sent a third letter to the Corinthians (again now lost). It grieved Paul to write this letter (2 Corinthians 2:3-4) because it had a strong disciplinary tone (2 Corinthians 7:8-9).

After the riot by the silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41) Paul left Ephesus in the spring of A.D. 56 (2 Corinthians 2:12-13).

It was from Macedonia Paul wrote his fourth letter to them (2 Corinthians), *and apparently made his third visit to Corinth in the winter of A.D. 56-57 (Acts 20:2-3).*

There were now insinuations that had been raised in Corinth about the authenticity of Paul’s apostleship, the propriety of his conduct, and the sincerity of his commitment to them. The whole book of 2 Corinthians is Paul’s defense of his apostleship.

He begins by addressing one of the challenges that had been levied against him... “Why was he constantly in danger from people?”

There are two words you should focus on in the passage today.

1 – comfort (used 10 times here), sometimes as a verb and sometimes as a noun
encouragement, exhortation, comfort, CHEER UP

2 – affliction (used 3 times here), again both as a noun and a verb
oppression, affliction, tribulation

³ ¶ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

These verses can strongly speak to us when we are going through suffering. Think about the times you have gone through a rough patch in life. How many times have you been able to encourage others who were going through a similar patch?

⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

As we go through suffering God is always there with not only sufficient comfort for us... but also abundant comfort.

⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

Whether they are afflicted or comforted it is for the comfort of the Corinthians in their suffering.

⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Although times were not easy for the Corinthian believers Paul was convinced that God would see them through. God can see you through anything.

⁸ ¶ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

God had a purpose in the affliction Paul and his companions experienced... so they wouldn't rely on themselves. Paul was absolutely convinced of this. Here again is one of the mysteries of prayer... Paul asked for their help by prayer.

There have been many things said in these verses that can encourage us.

- Encouragement, comfort, from God in anything
- One purpose of affliction... to minister to others
- The effectiveness of prayer

But there is also something else. There is a stark contrast between the Corinthians and Paul.

The Corinthians were immature while Paul was mature. They focused on heroes, not on Christ. They were arrogant about accepting an immoral man. They held to their rights. They overlooked headship in the home. They were proud of their gifting (*But not for ministry*). Some even questioned the resurrection of the dead.

Paul focused on Christ and ministry to them.

The Corinthians were self-centered (It's all about me!).

Paul was ministry centered, other-centered

Which direction is God drawing you... to the Corinthians' mindset or to Paul's?

Here's just one application of that mindset... are you thin skinned? This seems to be gaining ground as a problem in the contemporary church in America. Is it easy for you to get offended? Do you have a flash temper? Are these things more consistent with the Corinthians' mindset or Paul's? It takes a strong and mature Christian to respond like Paul.

Look again at Paul's words.

^{NET} **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** ¶ Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles so that we may be able to comfort those experiencing any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.