

2 CORINTHIANS

Suffering and the Power of the Spirit

Introduction

- Paul founded the church in Corinth after a 1.5 year stay
- Three years after, Paul wrote 1 Cor in AD 54 to address problems
- The problems escalated and Paul made a second “painful” visit in AD 55 (2:1) and a final visit in AD 57
- Apparently he wrote four letters to Corinth, the last one called “2 Corinthians” in AD 56
- Thus, 2 Cor was written with two concerns: (1) to report that people responded well to the “sorrowful letter” (7:8), and (2) to defend his apostolic ministry ahead of his final visit

Introduction

- Paul's critics called into question Paul's motive for taking a collection for believers in Jerusalem (8:20-21; cf. 2:17)
- Paul's opponents assumed that Paul suffered too much to be a spirit-filled apostle of the risen Christ
- Paul makes his case for the purpose of his suffering:
 - The very means by which believers are comforted (1:3-11)
 - God in Christ is made known in the world (4:7-18; 6:3-10)
 - Embodies the cross and manifests the power of the Spirit (12:7-10)

Why Does God Allow Suffering to His People?

- In Britain there are 11 shades of green that come from the mist and fog
- The irony of the Christian life is that God's grace is often experienced not in good times but in the worst of times
- God allows suffering to test our faith (Job)
- To call us to a heavenly hope: tribulation✉ perseverance✉ proven character✉ hope (Rom 5:3-5)
- To reveal our true love: "Nothing will separate us from the love of God" (Rom 8)
- Teach us obedience through discipline (Heb 12:6, 10-11)

Why Does God Allow Suffering to His People?

- To develop our spiritual strength for greater usefulness: ... “so that you may be mature and complete” (Jas 1:2-4)
- To refine and strengthen our faith: “These come so that the genuineness of your faith... even though refined by fire” (1 Pt 1:7)
- To enable us to help others (2 Cor 1:3-7)
- To display God’s power of deliverance (2 Cor 1:8-11)

1:3-11

- ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.
- ⁸ We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ¹¹ as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

To Enable Us to Help others (vv. 3-7)

- ... “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (vv. 3-4)
- The term “comfort” means to give strength, courage and bravery
- God allowed suffering in Paul’s life so he can experience God’s strength in his own weakness (2:9)
- God allows us to suffer so we can be a blessing to others
- When Christians suffer, it’s meant to be a partnership, not something we go through in isolation

To Display God's Power of Deliverance (vv. 8-11)

- We are not sure of the nature of Paul's affliction but he thought he was going to die (v. 9a)
- Why would God let people suffer so badly? ... "But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead" (v. 9b)
- But "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again" (v. 10)
- We won't experience God's strength until we suffer
- God's deliverance of Paul was the result of praying people (v. 11)
- Suffering is a partnership

2 Cor 4:7-18

- ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.
- ¹³ It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.
- ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is

The Trials and Rewards of Service (4:7-18)

- “We do not lose heart”—Paul defends his apostolic ministry in (v. 16; cf. vv. 1-2)
- The gospel— “We have this treasure in jars of clay” (v. 7)
- Christian servants are like old, frail clay pots, carrying the treasure within
- The gospel, which is the power of God, is not diminished by the weak vessel, because God uses us in spite of our frailties
- God allows us to suffer because “God’s grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (12:9)
- We must not rely on our own strength or talent

The Trials and Rewards of Service (4:7-18)

- Paul carried the “death of Jesus” (v. 10) in that he faced death constantly for Jesus’ sake (vv. 10-11)
- Paul patiently endured trials because he knows Christ’s resurrection guarantees the resurrection of believers (vv. 13-14)
- Paul refuses to be discouraged in spite of overwhelming hardship:
 - Daily strengthening of the inner person even though his physical powers are weakened (v. 16)
 - Our troubles produce for us “eternal glory” (v. 17)
 - We fix our eyes on eternal “unseen” things (v. 18)