

Let's turn in our bibles to what would probably be considered the least systematic yet the most personal of all of Paul's letters.

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

“Effectively Enduring Affliction”

When referring to the Corinthians letters we call them 1st and 2nd Corinthians but more accurately they're 2nd and 4th Cor. But since these are the only 2 letters we have to them we call them 1st and 2nd Cor. In reality it seems that Paul wrote to them 4 times but only 2 of those letters has God seen fit to preserve for us as inspired scripture. As you know Paul founded the church in Corinth. and You can read of his endeavors there in the book of Acts Ch 18 where you find that he was there ministering to and establishing them for about 1 ½ yrs. From there he left went to Ephesus, didn't stay there at that time but left Ephesus did some more traveling, ultimately came back to Ephesus where he then wrote to the Corinthians the 1st time exhorting them (amongst other things) not to keep company with sexually immoral people. (That is those who claim to be Christians yet are leading sexually immoral lives). We don't have that letter, but Paul refers to it in 1st Cor 5:9. and In response to that letter it seems that they wrote him back posing several different questions in regards to it. Paul then wrote to them a 2nd time and that's the letter we refer to as 1st Cor whereby he was sending them instruction concerning certain things, some out of necessity, others because they inquired of them specifically, but by and large it was a corrective epistle.

Well, apparently 1st Cor didn't have the desired effect Paul was praying for. Rather than responding and repenting it would seem that a significant # of believers there in Corinth took further issue with Paul. and So Paul apparently made a quick dash over to Corinth to try remedy the situation personally which again only stirred the pot and made matters worse still. (He refers to his visit here in Ch 2 Vs 1 saying that the whole thing was a sorrowful event, and then he speaks of coming to them a 3rd time in Vs 1 of Ch 13 of this letter which means he'd been to them once already after he'd established the church). Having then returned again to Ephesus he then wrote to them a 3rd time (again that letter has been lost) and we'll see reference in *this* letter to the fact that he sent it by the hands of Titus. and Since transportation and communication was difficult in that day it took Titus an unusually long amount of time to return. Well, in the meanwhile Paul was restless; he couldn't stand not knowing how things turned out. So after the riot in Ephesus Paul left and started heading up the coast so that if Titus was on route he'd hook up with him sooner. and So he got to Macedonia (probably the city of Philippi) and there Titus finally connected with him. and He brought Paul an encouraging report that (though there were still a few issues) for the most part things were good, they were receiving *from* him and responding *to* him now, God had brought healing to the situation. and W/that Paul sat down to pen now this 4th letter to them known as 2nd Cor whereby (as I said) he unveils himself in a much more personal way than in any of his other letters.

So now that you've got the “meanwhile” that took place between 1st Cor and 2nd Cor let's just jump right in here beginning in Vs 1.

Vs1

So with that we realize that this letter wasn't meant to be read only to the believers in Corinth but that it was to circulate in the region to believers in general. What that means is that there are things in here to bless and benefit all believers (you and me included).

and That as much as it had a "target audience" in Corinth it's got a much broader scope than Corinth as it pertains to the various principles and practical application found with in it.

and Paul begins this letter in a manner that's both familiar and necessary in that though things were better now in Corinth as a whole as it pertained to his position in their lives there were still some things that needed finalized and it was important that they be able to acknowledge the platform that he held as an apostle that God had given him in their lives. and So we read here, "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," which is to say that he wasn't who he was by the verification or ratification of man. He didn't go to the seminary of apostleship to learn the ins and outs of being an apostle graduating with a degree in apostleology thereby qualifying him to be an apostle. It was God who both called him and qualified him as an apostle. To the Galatians he put it like this, "*Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)*," Gal 1:1 Now I'm not saying that I'm against bible college or "higher education" in that respect or anything else. But what I am saying is that if God ordains you, you don't need the ordination of man. However if God hasn't called you, or doesn't ordain you for a particular task, it doesn't matter how many degrees, or doctorates you may acquire, you're not qualified as far as God is concerned. **So God calls you and God qualifies you, man can do neither.**

So it's important that they realize that this was God's doing in his life, and no one else's. In a very real respect not even *he* had anything to do with it, it wasn't even Paul's will, it was God's. Now he had a choice as to whether or not he would obey God's will for his life as do we all. But it was God's choice to call him as an apostle. If they had an issue that, (and his spiritual authority in their lives) then in reality their problem was with God because He's the One who called and qualified Paul as an apostle, no one else.

Now as it pertains to you and me, what's important for us to realize is that we should be able to say the same thing with regards to where we're at and what we're doing. **God doesn't call everyone to be a Pastor, or an evangelist, or a spiritual authority, He's calls some people to be school teachers, or construction workers, or perhaps doctors, or stay home moms. Because there are people in every arena of life that need to see the light of Jesus Christ shining in people's lives that they might be saved. So if you're "Bob, general contractor by the will of God."** That's ok, what's important is that you recognize where God has you and what He wants to do through you right where you're at.

Something else I see in this is the fact that God may make certain decisions or do things in certain people's lives that I don't understand or on the surface even see the logic of. But who am I to take issue with that? **God is privy to all sorts of things that I have no clue about, so if He sees fit to call someone and qualify them in some manner, for some task, rather than take issue with it, how much better to simply rejoice *in* it and praise God for His grace toward their lives?**

Once again I would draw your attention to the fact that he writes to the church *of* God which is *at* Corinth. We realize that there's only 1 church, its God's. Now where various members of the church meet may be different but it's all God's. We're the church of God which is *at* Joplin MO, and there are several other believers gathering in different buildings all over this city who would fall under that same banner. **But ultimately it's all one church, there's only 1 body of Christ, and you're either apart of it or your not. So though we understand that the body meets in various buildings at various places throughout the world, we also realize that all of us collectively make up one church singularly, the church of God.**

Vs2

Few things here, #1 We realize in this statement the deity and equality of Jesus Christ with God the Father. Because it would be nothing short of blasphemy to place anyone less than God on the same platform *as* God in issuing forth a blessing (Grace and peace) from them together. **and This word "Lord" here is the word "Kurios" in the Greek which is the title of deity. It's because Christians wouldn't bow the knee to Caesar saying "Caesar is Kurios" that many of them were executed, because Caesar wasn't deity and they refused to place him on an "on par" platform with God.**

We're also reminded here as to the nature of our relationship to God as our Father. "From God *our* Father." and Of course we could spend some significant time right here simply developing the reality of what that means to us. How much God loves us and has given Himself for us and how that if we being evil know how and desire to give good things to our children, how much more does your heavenly Father desire to give good things and bless your life as His child? Paul told the Romans, "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*" Rom 8:32 **Or to understand that another way; if God was willing to give up His only begotten Son for you, out of His love toward you, what make you think that now He'll with hold something that's good for me, or a help to me? He's already given me the very best, everything else is nothing comparatively, if He didn't with hold Jesus, than He won't with hold anything that's needed to help me, or would be a blessing to me.** Now, Father knows best, sometime what we think is best would destroy us if given to us, so we thank God that in His love He will with hold from us what we don't need, or would be ultimately damaging to us. **But your heavenly Father loves you, and is there for you. and Of course we realize that God isn't our Father in the same sense that He's the Lord's Father. He only has 1 begotten Son, we're sons and daughters by election and adoption, not by right (like Jesus) but by redemption.**

Finally here in Vs 2 we see what's been termed as the Siamese twins of the NT "Grace and peace," linked together this way in virtually all of Paul's epistles and always in this order. Why? Because you can't know the peace of God with out 1st experiencing the grace of God. and The reference here isn't to what we might refer to as "saving" grace or peace "with" God, but rather what we might refer to as "sustaining" grace and the peace "of" God. **It's true, we're saved by grace, it's by grace we've been saved through faith, and that not of ourselves it's the gift of God. But God's grace goes well beyond *saving* us, it's also vital in *sustaining* us. and So we read in the book of Hebrews, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Heb 4:16**

God saves us by His grace and He sustains us by His grace, “Grace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” “and Peace,” again not peace *with* God, that happens upon reconciliation to God through the cross of Jesus Christ We read in the book of Rom, “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Rom 5:1 What’s in view here is the peace of God, God’s own peace safeguarding and garrisoning your heart. Jesus said, “*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you,*” John 14:27 It’s not a peace of this world, its peace that’s out of this world, it’s not natural its supernatural, its God’s personal peace. and It’s something that we acquire through prayer, trusting in the Lord with all of our heart and leaning not on our own understanding. To the Philippians Paul wrote the familiar passage, “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” Phil 4:6-7 Of course the short of that is “Don’t worry about anything, but rather pray about and trust God with everything, and then God’s peace can rule in your heart because you’ve given your situation and circumstance to the Lord and you know that come what may, in whatever way, God is in control and you trust in Him.” Isaiah put it like this, “*You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*” Isa 26:3 So (Vs2-4) Vs3-4

So straight out of the shoot Paul bursts out in praise, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and Our attention is sort of immediately occupied with the context that surrounds his praise, “Tribulation, and trouble.” How often we find ourselves whining and whimpering, murmuring and complaining in times of trouble, and tribulation. Offering up praise and adulation to the Lord when things are going great is a good thing, but how about when things aren’t so great. What’s the general demeanor of my heart toward the Lord at that time? David said, “*I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.*” Ps 34:1 Not only when things are going good in the home or at work, when I got a new car, or toy of some kind, but even when times are tough, when I don’t understand how or why things could be going the way that they are, even still I will praise the Lord because He is worthy of my praise. How shallow is the relationship with God that hinges my praise to God upon the circumstances that surround my life, “If you bless me I’ll praise you, if I’m burdened I’ll sulk in my own personal pity party.” Isn’t that the way we so often are? How sad is that? God’s worth in my life is not based up my emotional, or physical, or material well being, God is worthy of all that I am regardless of my emotional, or physical, or material well being. Remember these words? “*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.*” Job 1:21 I will bless the Lord at *all* times; His praise shall *continually* be in my mouth.

and Paul points out 2 attributes of God here in Vs 3. #1 He’s the Father of mercies and #2 He’s the God of all comfort. 1st of all He’s the Father of mercies, what does that mean? It means that mercy originates in God; He is the Father or originator of mercy. He is the wellspring of mercy.

John 8:44 tells us that Satan is the father of lies, the lie originated in him, he's been a liar from the beginning and in him there is no truth. He's a deceiver and he's deceived countless millions if not billions down through the years. I was online the other day and there was a website, and it's dedicated to getting kids to blaspheme God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They send in videos of them doing it and it's posted on line. (Be aware of what your children are up against; don't be ignorant of your enemy's devices) and I was glancing over it and there was a section on there of a kid who'd made a chart of how many people God had killed in the bible Vs how many people Satan had killed in the bible. and At 1st it made me mad, but the more I thought about it the more it grieved me because this kid had been deceived. **Sure God is a holy and righteous God who deals with unrighteousness or wickedness His holiness demands it or else He wouldn't be holy. But you know the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.** and The bible isn't a play by play of the subtleties and the strategies of Satan, as a matter of fact there's not an overwhelming amount of information even given to us in the bible about Satan. We know he's a liar/deceiver, he's a murderer, a thief, he's the accuser of the brethren and roams the earth looking for whom he may devour. **But by and large the bible doesn't occupy itself with Satanic statistics (what's the point in that) the volume of the book points to, revolves around, or speaks of Jesus Christ The fact is that Satan has been the murderer of countless billions throughout the ages because of the fact that he's deceived them, lied to them, robbed them of a relationship with Jesus Christ just as he's doing to that same kid. Satan is the father of lies, but God is the Father of mercy.**

What is mercy? If grace is giving us what we don't deserve, then mercy is not giving us what we do deserve. The bible says, *"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not."* Lam 3:22

and There are several things we learn about the mercies of God through His Word. We learn His mercies are manifold, that they're tender, that they're great, that they're inexhaustible, and that they're new (or fresh and ready to be tapped) every morning. So He's the Father of mercies, and #2 the God of all comfort.

Now when we read of the word "comfort" don't be deceived into thinking of comfort as some sort of "soothing sympathy" or perhaps a sort of "sweet sentimentality," this word carries the idea of strengthening, helping, and making strong. It's the same word Jesus used of the Holy Spirit when He said, *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;"* John 14:16 It's the word "Parakletos" in the Greek, "Para" meaning to come alongside, and "Kletos" or "Kleton" there's a few variations of the word speaking of "to help" or "to strengthen." You think of a "Para" "medic" a medic that comes alongside to help, or strengthen. We're speaking here of a word that gives you the inner strength to carry on and endure.

So what we're seeing here is that God is the One we're to turn to and depend on for that inner strength and help in time of need to carry on, because He is the source of our comfort. As the Psalmist said, *"I lift up my eyes to the hills--where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."* Ps 121:1-2 Often times we look to a change of circumstance for our comfort, as though receiving comfort and being comfortable are synonymous in their meaning. Not true.

God's comfort comes to us in verb form; it's an action word that speaks imparting strength to your inner man. It's not something that *ends* suffering or affliction, but rather grants us the fortitude to *endure* tribulation and trouble. We want it to *end*, God wants us to *endure*. Why? (Vs 4b, read)

Amongst other things one of the things God equips you for through your own personal pain and affliction is to be an instrument of compassion toward others. That you and I might be able to connect and engage people on a real level in their hurts, in their disillusionments, and afflictions in this life. That we might point them to the same hope that we have and testify to the faithfulness of God in their life to see them through even as God has been faithful to us in our tribulation as well. God told the children of Israel not to oppress the strangers in the land because they knew what it was like to be a stranger in the land of Egypt, they could identify with that anxiety and were therefore to be moved with compassion to others who were in that place of hardship.

Think about it, there's a lot you can learn from a book. But there is a significant difference between academic knowledge and experiential knowledge. and It's good to have a working knowledge of the bible academically, but nothing will teach you like living the truth of God's word in your life personally/practically. It's like when you listen to someone teach on parenting skills that doesn't have any kids, it's not that their perspective is bad or even incorrect. But it lacks a certain depth and understanding that you can only get from having had kids yourself. and God wants to use us *effectively*, therefore we often learn of Him and His attributes in real life scenarios *practically*. Because we can learn of God's faithfulness and comfort academically here, but once gain an understanding of them because they've applied to me personally/practically, that's reality, there's a depth and substance to that that you just can't learn from a book. Think about it. Who do you want cracking open your chest, or performing some sorta surgery on you? Someone who read about it in a book? Or someone who has plenty of practical experience, has been there, done that, is familiar with the reality of it? God equips us for His purpose for us through real time practical experience.

Now, I want you to see something here because there are those who'll say that you can't identify with someone's struggles if you haven't had those identical struggles. That's not what this is saying. Notice that God comforts us in *all* our tribulation, so that we can comfort those who are in *any* trouble.

The word, "Tribulation" is the word "Thlipsis" it speaks of a pressing in on, or pressure. The point being that tribulation comes in multiple forms, physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, whatever. But the bottom line is that if you've been on the receiving end of pressure, or a pressing in on you, stress, tension, apprehension, then you can identify with someone else on that level. My circumstance and your circumstance may vary in detail, but hardship/stress, and pressure feels the same on the inside regardless of the circumstance that may bring that to me on the outside. So if God has been faithful to me in my pain, my affliction, my suffering, I'm then able to testify to that reality and help bolster you up, encourage you and allow God to minister that same strength to you through me in your time of need. The details of our pain may vary, but we both know what it means to hurt and in that God's compassion can flow through you to me in my hour of affliction.

Vs5

The short of this is God is more than able to comfort you, and comfort me regardless of the degree of suffering that may enter into my life. As suffering abounds, so does consolation or comfort through Christ. If we enter into the sufferings of Christ, we enter in to consolation *through Christ*. Now he's obviously not referencing suffering in a redemptive manner in that context of the sufferings of Christ. But we are the body of Christ and when you suffer there is an extent to which Christ suffers. Remember when the Lord confronted Paul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" "Who are you Lord?" "I'm Jesus who you are persecuting." Well Paul never physically laid a hand on Jesus, but in persecuting the body of Christ he was persecuting Christ. Jesus said that whatever happens to the least of these (His brethren, disciples) happens to Him. In the book of Philippians Paul mentions entering in to the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. But as we suffer *in Christ*, we're comforted *through Christ*.

Vs6

We've spoken of how that when we're blessed it's for the benefit of others. Have you ever stopped to think about the fact that when you're afflicted, that it's for the sake of others as well? Paul says here that everything that comes in to his life, be it affliction or be it comfort, it's to benefit and somehow help...others. Everything Jesus did was for others, and here we see the love of God working so deeply in the apostle that he's able to see and say that everything that goes on in his life, God is working in him for the sake of others. What a non-self absorbed frame of heart and mind that is. When I'm suffering I want to have a pity party, have everyone focus on me, rally around me. Paul is saying, "When I suffer I'm looking not for the damage it's doing to me, but for the good it can bring to you, be it for your consolation, or helping sustain you in your salvation. Helping undergird you, and root you in the faithfulness of God toward your life as seen in mine." God help us, that's incredible.

and He says that when you see God at work in someone's life that way, it's powerful. It's "Effective for enduring the same suffering which we also suffer." Again not outwardly, circumstantially, but inwardly, the pain we feel personally. and When we speak of enduring we're not talking about passively accepting, but rather triumphantly overcoming, reaching the end result God desires through it. It carries the idea of the marathon runner enduring the pain, and pressing toward the goal. It's God's comfort, His strength *in* you and help *for* you that's going to cause you to effectively endure affliction. When I see it real in your life, it's going to encourage me to endure effectively when I'm at that place in my life. Be it your comfort, or your affliction, when I see the Lord ministering to you in those times, it's going to stir in me powerfully, encourage me to trust in the Lord for that same reality personally.

Vs 7

Paul is simply saying, "I know sometimes the affliction seems unbearable, but I'm confident you'll make it through to the glory of God, because God doesn't allow you to partake of Christ's sufferings with out causing you to partake of the consolation, the comfort, the inner strength to endure."

We've spoken about being able to identify with and minister to one another by experiencing real life hardship. But we have a high priest who can identify on the level of our personal pain as well. Who has compassion on us having identified with us on every level of temptation, and going well beyond anything we'll ever experience as it pertains to suffering affliction and hardship, and He *endured* the cross. So trust in Him, look *to* Him knowing that as you partake of the sufferings, so also you'll partake of the consolation, the comfort, the strengthening of the inner man that you might endure, and God will use you in a powerful way to bless the lives of others.

Prayer Points:

God would You extract that self-centered frame of heart and mind that so easily ensnares us? and Help us to realize that the work You're doing in us so rarely stops *with* us; be it in affliction, or in Your comfort toward us/in us You want to bless and bring encouragement to others through us. Sometimes when we ask You to make us usable I fear we don't really know what we're asking for. But God we trust in You, and may we be able to echo the words of the Psalmist who said, "*In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.*" Ps 94:19 We thank You for Your love for us, and Your ability to sustain us, that we can come boldly before Your throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

and If you're here and you don't know the Lord in a personal way, you're all too familiar with the feeling of being with out hope, being with out God in the world. There's comfort, hope, healing and forgiveness that awaits you in Christ. It's not a primrose path, it's a path laden with difficulties, hardships and afflictions, but none of those things compare with the eternal weight of glory which will be revealed in you on that day in Christ Jesus. God stands ready to forgive your sin, all you have to do is ask, just repent of your sin, and surrender your heart to the Lord.