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## Exhortation

# "The God of my life"

## 7. "The God of all comfort"

Jim Wood

**I**T IS PAUL, writing his second letter to Corinth, who uses the phrase, "the God of all comfort" (1:3), and this from a man who in the service of his God had suffered so much discomfort.

Twice in this very epistle he presents a catalogue of tribulation: once as those things which might befall "ministers of God", namely: "afflictions . . . necessities . . . distresses . . . stripes . . . imprisonments . . . tumults . . . labours . . . watchings . . . fastings" (6:4,5); and once as those situations he had himself experienced already: "five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep". To these he adds: "perils of waters . . . perils of robbers . . . perils by mine own countrymen . . . perils by the heathen . . . in the city . . . in the wilderness . . . in the sea" (11:24-26).

Furthermore, there was not a day that passed when he did not feel the inescapable burden of responsibility for his brethren and sisters: "Beside those things that are without [many other things I have omitted to mention?], that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (v. 28). Yet he can say: "Blessed be God . . . the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (1:3).

When, where and how did he receive that comfort? He continues: "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation [the same word as 'comfort'] also aboundeth by Christ" (v. 5). He knew well the sufferings the Lord Jesus had endured so that salvation might be made possible. He knew that "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3) had been faithful to His principles, and that the Lord Jesus, now beyond the reaches of physical pain and mental trauma, had entered the joy that was promised.

So Paul was comforted in the knowledge that the same principles applied to him. God, Who cannot change, would be as faithful to him as He had been to His Son. That conviction lifted his

spirits in depressing times, boosted his courage in the face of danger, eased the pain when physically and mentally he experienced extreme discomfort. This knowledge and belief energised him when exhausted, and, as a consequence, his hope of experiencing the same joy now "aboundeth by Christ".

However, the comfort that followed Paul's experience of hardship was not selfishly kept to himself. It was a fruit to be distributed, an asset to be shared, a resource to be used. Of himself, and those of similar mind, he said: "we [are] able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (v. 4). He saw his affliction and the comfort that ensued as not only for his own profit. He believed they were for the benefit of others: "it is for *your* consolation and salvation" (v. 6). He saw himself not just as a preacher of the gospel by word, but as a minister whose whole life was being used by the Almighty as encouragement to others whose lives were not smooth and comfortable.

Can we raise our understanding of what happens to us to the same level as that of Paul? Can we see every affliction as an opportunity for helpful meditation, every tribulation as an opportunity for a deeper appreciation of what the Lord suffered, every trial as an opportunity for growing stronger, every distress as an opportunity to be comforted in the knowledge of God's promise, principles and faithfulness, and every moment of comfort as a means of developing our capacity to help others?

Should it not be thought a great privilege to be used by our Maker in whatever way He sees fit? We are, generally, pleased to consciously commit our time and resources in a way which does little to upset our comfortable life. It is, perhaps, not as easy to accept that we might suffer so others might be comforted.

It is a great challenge to say, "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee"—and to accept it when He does.