



Comfort/encouragement from Second Corinthians ...

Sharers in Sufferings and Comfort

God can supply abundance whenever and wherever He chooses to do so. The Almighty, according to His own word, makes the earth "bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater" (Isaiah 55:10). This abundance of the earth is not the only abundance; the point to which God is pointing is the distribution of His word. "So shall My word be," said He, "which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). The abundant harvest of eternal souls is God's great purpose. But there are also some "abundances" which those who participate in the gospel share as well.

■ **Parallel but contrasting** — Why shouldn't Christians share in the sufferings of Christ, at least to some degree? One manner in which the Father demonstrated that Christ was "for real" rather than some fake was through His sufferings. The only reason such suffering would be worthwhile for Him who descended from heaven would be if it were the only means by which lost souls could be rescued. Only through His suffering and dying could the world be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Christians, then, following in the footsteps of their Lord, are also asked to participate in sufferings in order to demonstrate to the world that their faith is real, and that the message proclaimed through them is true. "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing" stated Peter (1 Peter 4:13). The saint can rejoice in suffering, because it is not all suffering. "For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance," observes the apostle Paul, "so also our comfort is abundant through Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:5). No matter how great the suffering, the spiritual comforting "touch" of the One who is described as "love" is greater!

■ **For someone else's comfort and salvation** — Jesus went through all that He went through for the sake of the salvation of mankind. The long term benefit to Him would be that millions would honor and worship Him, but there was no immediate return on the anguish He endured. Thus, saints such as the apostle Paul imitated Him, persecuted and martyred for the sake of others. "For if we are afflicted," avers the apostle, "it is for your comfort and salvation" (2 Corinthians 1:6). When someone suffers and overcomes successfully, it is of great encouragement to others who are similarly suffering, and they are comforted in the knowledge that they are not alone, that there is someone else who understands. Suffering is generally involved in some way in the process of getting the gospel to the lost; hence Paul's statement that his affliction, and that of his fellow proclaimers, is for the brethren's salvation.

■ **Effective enduring** — Paul comes back again to the comfort and encouragement redounding to the brethren. "If we are afflicted," he says, it is for the comfort and salvation of the saints. "Or if," he appends, "we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer." The encouragement emanating from the comfort that the apostles received from the Holy Spirit really assisted the brethren in patiently enduring their challenges of discouragement and persecution coming their way. Such endurance, of course, is the difference between tremendous victory and devastating defeat.

The battle for the soul is intense, but Paul expressed his hopeful confidence in the eternity of the brethren. "Our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers in our sufferings, so you also are sharers in our comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:7). The principle is the same, whether it be Christ, whether it be Paul, or whether it be the saint of God: first the cross, then the crown; first the suffering, then the comfort or encouragement. May modern saints be spiritually geared up so that they may endure their suffering, and share their encouragement.

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