

Why God Allows Us To Have Serious Problems

(2 Corinthians 1:1-7)

I love this epistle because it is filled with some of the most famous verses in the Bible. Also, it is a very personal letter in which Paul shares some of the most difficult, discouraging experiences in his life.

Paul founded the church at Corinth around AD 50 on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). Corinth was located in *Achaia*, which was roughly the southern half of Greece.

Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians while he is in Macedonia (Northern Greece) around AD 56, a few months after his first epistle to the Corinthian church. This epistle begins by introducing its author: *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* (1:1a). An *apostle* is one sent forth with a message. Paul was sent as a messenger of *Christ Jesus by the will of God* to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18-20).

He states the letter is also sent by *Timothy our brother* (1:1b). Timothy joined Paul and Silas on the second missionary journey and became Paul's traveling assistant (Acts 16:1-5). They established churches all over the Mediterranean world. What does Paul write about Timothy in Philippians 2:22?

Paul is writing to the church *at Corinth* and *all the saints*, or believers, in *Achaia* (1:1c-d). He begins with his usual greeting: *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:2). *Grace* (CHARIS, kar'-is) refers to God's undeserved acceptance and love. The result of *grace* is *peace* (EIRENE, iray'-nay), which translates the Greek word from which we get the names "Irene" and "Irena." It refers to a state of inner tranquility, but can also refer to an absence of conflict among people. As Christians, one of our primary responsibilities is reducing conflict in all our relationships. That's why God gives us what command in Romans 12:18?

In verses 3-7, Paul explains **why God allows us to have serious problems**, which the Bible calls "tribulations." First is ...

So we can listen to others more compassionately (1:3a-b)

Paul writes: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies* (1:3a-b). The word translated *mercies* refers to having "compassion" or "pity" for the problems of others. God is *the Father of mercies*, which means all compassion and pity originate with Him. Mercy begins with a willingness to listen to the hurts of others. What is the result of God being merciful, according to Psalm 145:18?

God is eternally merciful; therefore, He is always willing to hear our prayers. He wants us to share our hurts, frustrations, and fears with Him. However, we must do so *in truth*, which means according to the teaching of Scripture (Jn 17:17). This consists of obeying all the commands in the Bible, including what command in Luke 6:36?

If we are merciful, we will always have time to listen compassionately to the hurts and fears of others. I am not referring to the "*chronic crybabies*" who whine every day, but those who are really going through tough, heart-breaking tribulation.

God allows us to have serious problems, **so we can listen to others more compassionately** and ...

So we can comfort others more effectively (1:3c, 4, 6)

God is also the *God of all comfort* (1:3c). The word translated *comfort* (PARAKLESIS, para-klay'-sis) means coming to one's side to console or help. Jesus uses the same Greek word (PARACLETE) to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. Write it below:

God wants us to be good stewards of our pain and hurts. Therefore, Paul writes, God *comforts us in all our affliction* (1:4a). The verb *comforts* is present tense, which means God *comforts* us constantly and unfailingly. The word translated *affliction*, or "tribulation" (THLIPSIS, th-lip'-sis), literally means to be under pressure, or distressed. It refers to the tremendous stress life often puts upon us.

God *comforts* us in all *affliction*, so we may be able to *comfort* others in any *affliction*, with the *comfort* with which we ourselves are *comforted* by God (1:4b-c). God does not intend His *comfort* to end with us. He wants us to be a pipeline of His *comfort* to others.

Everything we receive from God is to be passed on to others. We receive God's *comfort* as a sacred trust to be shared with others. God doesn't want us to be selfish with His *comfort*. Also, He will not give us what we refuse to give to others. How does Jesus express this principle in Matthew 6:15?

God is always consistent, so Jesus could say the same thing about *comfort*. If you refuse to share or offer *comfort*, don't expect God to *comfort* you in your tribulations.

Paul writes he and his associates are *afflicted* for the *comfort and salvation* of the Corinthians (1:6a). They have suffered much to bring them the Gospel, so they can receive *salvation* (Acts 18). Paul explains since he and Timothy *are comforted*, they can extend the same *comfort* to the Corinthians. Therefore, they can *patiently endure the same sufferings* (1:6b).

Probably no other church caused Paul more grief and pain than the church at Corinth, even though he invested eighteen months of his life ministering there (Acts 18:11). The principle is: we don't *comfort* others because they deserve it, but because God has comforted us. Therefore, what does Paul write in 1 Thessalonians 5:15?

Sometimes God allows us to have *affliction* to equip us to *comfort* others, even those who haven't been very nice to us.

God allows us to have serious problems **so we can listen to others more compassionately, so we can comfort others more effectively**, and ...

So, we will cherish God's comfort more dearly (1:5, 7)

In verse five, Paul specifies the suffering as *Christ's sufferings*. Therefore, we are to comfort those living for Christ in a hostile world. During persecution, we receive abundant comfort, and through Christ that comfort overflows to others (1:5). God uses three sources of comfort when consoling us: the promises of the Bible, the presence of other believers, and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

What is your favorite Bible verse? It is probably your favorite because it has been a great source of comfort during times of adversity. Because I have a lifelong fear of public speaking, my favorite verse is 2 Timothy 1:7. Write **your** favorite verse below:

Who is your most cherished brother or sister in Christ? Why? Probably because he or she has been a source of comfort to you. However, who actually uses a Bible verse or a believer to comfort you? The Holy Spirit!

Paul concludes this section, *Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort* (1:7). Many believers in the church at Corinth were a disappointment to Paul and to the Lord. We learn in Paul's first epistle to this church that some were guilty of drunkenness, some of spreading horrible gossip about Paul, some of immorality, others of misusing their spiritual gifts, etc.

People in your church will disappoint you. Whenever another believer disappoints you, or when you are disappointed in yourself, there is a great verse of comfort for such situations. It is Philippians 1:6b personalize this verse:

God will bring every true believer to fruition at the return of Christ. That truth is why Paul's hope in the Corinthian believers was *unshaken*, or "steadfast" (1:7).