

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 1

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 1: 1-24

This so-called “Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians” is really the fourth letter Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. The following construction of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church helps us understand the background of his letters better:

- Year 50-51: Paul’s evangelic work in Corinth during his second journey. As a result a church was planted.
- Year 54: Letter 1, now lost, was written by Paul, as alluded in I Cor 5:9, as a follow-up after he left Corinth. Paul then receives a visit from someone of Chloe’s household who told Paul about the situation of the Corinthian church.
- Year 54: Letter 2 [I Corinthians], written by Paul in Ephesus and sent from Philippi, during his third journey. Paul sends Timothy to Corinth on a special mission [Acts 19:22; I Cor 4:17, 16:10]. Timothy was unable to deal with the situation [2 Cor 2:5-11]. Timothy returns to Paul. Paul then decides to go to Corinth himself.
- Year 55: Paul’s ‘painful’ visit [2 Cor 2:1] from Ephesus to Corinth and back.
- Year 55: Letter 3 [2 Cor 2:4,9; 7:8-9], sent from Ephesus, carried by Titus. Paul heard from Titus a good report about the church while in Macedonia [2 Cor 7:5-8].
- Year 56: Letter 4 [2 Corinthians], written from Macedonia during his third journey, carried by Titus to Corinth.
- Year 57: Paul joins Titus in Corinth [Acts 20:1-3] on his way to Jerusalem. Paul writes his letter to the Romans from Corinth during the stay.

1. God’s comfort and consolation in the midst of suffering: v. 1-11

In verses 1:3-7 Paul writes ‘comfort’ ten times. During his ministry in Asia God used Paul in great ways to spread the gospel of Christ to many people. When it became too difficult to safely continue his evangelical work in Ephesus, he crossed the sea and came to Greece. There were numerous experiences of suffering. But Paul experienced greater measure of comfort of God in spite of tribulation. And he called such God as “God of all comfort” [v.3]. Paul begins his letter with his assertion as “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God [v. 1].” And he refers to the Corinthian church as “the church of God.” And all saints who were in Achaia were in Paul’s heart and prayers as he wrote this letter [v. 1]. How thankful we are for such true servants of God who have the interests of God’s children in their hearts in spite of suffering and tribulation they go through in their ministry. And because God was able to comfort them during their experiences of tribulation and suffering, they are now offering their comfort to the saints [v. 6].

Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. [v. 1:6]

Paul could write so because he had received comfort of God as he realized that Christ Jesus went through much greater suffering, even the death of Cross because of his own sins. So his comfort was abounding in Christ [v. 5]. This is ‘fellowship of suffering’ as well as ‘fellowship of comfort.’ Our Lord Jesus suffered first on our behalf. Because of His suffering, we have been made whole before God. And as we face suffering and tribulation God provides the same comfort and strength that He had given to His Son and we are able to rejoice that the comfort we have is not of our own selves or of human origin but it comes from the Throne of Grace. As we receive such comfort from God, we are also able to share the same comfort with those who are undergoing difficult times. And this is what Paul was writing about in these verses.

In the city of Corinth over two thirds of the population were slaves. Likewise, many members of the Corinthian church were slaves. Life was not easy for many believers. So when Paul had these fellow Christians in his heart as he wrote this letter, his heart went out to their sufferings and tribulations. And he is now encouraging them to be partakers of the same consolation from God as they were partakers of Christ's sufferings [v. 7]. Then, Paul shares his experiences in Ephesus, where he had been under the threat of death, which he describes as "the sentence of death" [v. 9]. But he confesses that such extreme danger caused him and his companions to "trust in God, who raises the dead." Obviously, he is referring to God raising Jesus from the dead. It is very wonderful to think how God was able to strengthen and comfort Paul and his companions through life-threatening experiences to trust in God wholly and to give themselves dedicated in the ministry. Furthermore, Paul was offering the same comfort and strength he received of God to the Christians in Achaia. This is a beautiful picture of God's true ministry. May all servants of God have the same mind as apostle Paul did and give themselves wholly to God's ministry in the love of Christ and in the love of lost souls!

In verse 11 we can learn of two things: First, the ministry of prayer, which lay Christians can do in diligence for those in various ministries of God. They need your prayers. Paul realized that and sought the Christians to pray for him and his companions. Secondly, he realized that God used many people who provided gifts to enable him and his companions to carry on the ministry. God is not short of material wealth. Yet God uses dedicated people who love God and whose hearts are in God's ministry. They give material gifts as well as their prayers and hearts for His ministry.

2. Paul's travel plan: v. 12-24

In verse 12 Paul presents his testimony about his manner of ministry as one of "simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God" [v. 12]. This is the best maxim that Christian ministers must keep in mind when trying to admonish or correct a congregation that has gone wrong. As we see in the summary history of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church, Paul has yet to see significant improvements in the spiritual status of this church. His words of admonishing had to be backed by his ministry of simplicity, godly sincerity, divine wisdom and grace. And he wanted the Corinthians to acknowledge this fact [v. 13]. With that request, Paul is notifying them of his travel plan to visit Corinth on his way to Judea [v. 16].

Finally, he reminds that that he and his companions are working for God in His work:

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. [v. 20-22]

Paul's manner of ministry is, indeed, one of gentle persuasion and yet of firm conviction. He keeps reminding the believers that his ministry is not a personal one but of God, which is different from the Greek polytheism or pagan worship. The gift of Holy Spirit in all of us is a surety, seal and guarantee of this truth. And he points to the worthwhileness of repentance and self-cleansing so that this work of God among them could bring glory to God.

Discussion topics:

- 1. Let us share our own experiences of suffering/ hardship, in which God provided comfort and strength.*
- 2. How could Paul have the heart to share his comfort with the Corinthian Christians when he had undergone life-threatening experiences during his evangelical work? Let us share thoughts.*