

“Pressure”

- 2 Corinthians 1, *part 1* -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on Sept 26, 2021



1 Corinthians 1:1-11 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus*

Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 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. 7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation. 8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, 11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth from the ministerial “front lines” of Ephesus. At the end of 1 Corinthians he said: “*a great and effective door was opened unto me, but there are many adversaries.*” (1 Cor. 16:9) To grasp the real impact of Paul’s letter we need to understand that he wasn’t writing on his laptop in a comfortable air conditioned study somewhere. Paul was effectively writing from the middle of a war. So the issues he addressed naturally came with a very real sense of serious passion and urgency.

The first letter to this church gave us a picture of the problems that existed there. There was carnality and there was spiritual immaturity. We have to know that that is a dangerous combination in any individual and especially in a local body of Christ that is supposed to corporately exude the heart and demeanor of Christ.

Before, during, and after the writing of this letter, Paul was trying to visit the church in Corinth. After the rather serious correction via his first letter, some of believers there repented and embraced his instructions. Yet there were some who only dug in. That’s generally the split reaction in a group of people. So God does some house cleaning, and the church goes on and grows on. Because of all of this, Paul felt the necessity to pay this church a visit but was finding it difficult to free himself from his current situation there in Ephesus. The believers there in Corinth seemed to be a bit upset by his delay. Such a “me-attitude” is a common manifest from immature believers. Like children they were crying because they were not getting the attention they wanted. They had no concept of a larger world outside their own. A child’s world revolves only around him/herself, so they have very little care about others’ lives and callings. *Why can’t the pastor spend time with me and maybe come to dinner?*

Paul was apparently at a critical point of ministry in Ephesus. But again, the Corinthian church did not seem to have a lot of concern about that. They did not understand the realities of ministry and service. That’s not to say that the believers there weren’t growing at all, but their journey was difficult and at times painfully slow. There seemed to be a pattern of two steps forward and one back. How was Paul to make them understand the realities of ministry without sounding like he was whining?

Just as in our modern churches, there were no doubt those who would not tolerate God’s directions or pastoral instruction and had left that church in Corinth. But what was worse was that some no doubt *had not left*, and

were still there but like a cancer. We know that there were those there in the Corinthian church who clearly rejected Paul's authority as a pastor, along with his instruction, so **nothing** he had to say made any difference to these people. You know these folks don't you? In little side groups of 1 or two others they will just quietly whisper... "well, I disagree with my church on that issue...I don't think the same way as my pastor on that subject."

I have no doubt the Corinth church was a little smaller at the writing of this letter. God had undoubtedly shook things up there somewhat with the arrival of Paul's first letter. As I said, there will always be those who will not have a teachable heart and will not receive correction, and will inevitably move on when confronted concerning their sin. Ironically this most often does not come from a new believer, but most often from someone who has walked amongst us for a period who believes he or she has spiritually "arrived." Such people will "circumcise their minds," but are unwilling to "circumcise their hearts." They will not cut away the flesh from their spirit of pride and hard heartedness. They will not cut away the "flesh."

In his love for the flock and his desire to instruct them, Paul opens his heart in this letter to a greater degree than in any of his other letters. We will see here a personal side of Paul that is unparalleled elsewhere in the New Testament. We cannot miss the sense of joy and passion he had in serving the Lord, as well as the physical and emotional cost that was involved in him persevering in it. Paul knew what it was to endure the pressures of ministry! Few outside of the ring will ever know what it is like in there. The great pastor Charles Spurgeon once remarked "I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go." What is the secret of survival in such states of heart and mind? The answer ...*and no doubt both Spurgeon and the Apostle Paul knew it*, is to get your eyes off yourself and onto God and onto others. Those who are unable to do this, or moreover *unwilling to do this*, will eventually bow out of their service and often out of the race all together.

Paul's first letter dealt with corrections and conditions within the Corinthian church, while his second letter focuses more on ministry within the church. His role in the first letter was that of the teacher, and now in the second, he embraces the role of pastor. He is more personal, more intimate, more leading.

For Paul, loving Christ meant **servicing** Christ, and he did so with all of His heart, soul, and strength. Christianity was not a belief system or a mental ascent to him. It was a radical lifestyle that was lived out in the physical realm. He **did** Christianity. He **lived** Christ! It was literally the center of everything he did.

It seems the church in Corinth had responded to Paul's first letter, so now Paul is responding to **that** letter. Wouldn't it be great to have **their** letter? Even without it though, we can extrapolate from Paul's writings as to how they reacted. Paul will herein speak of the blessings and trials of the servant of Christ, along with all the training/breaking/and blessing that comes with such a journey.

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:

Paul begins this letter, almost with an air of defense as to his calling. Again we note that Paul no doubt had his distractors and adversaries in the Corinthian church. It just always goes with the territory. Thus he opens right off the bat by establishing his authority and call. This is not in an effort to lord over his readers, but a declaration of the fact that God was the author of all that he was teaching.

It's obvious that Paul was clear as to his calling. For him, the ministry was not a "career choice." It is not to be now, and it certainly was not then when such a vocation could easily cost you your life! Paul does not claim his calling came via a seminary or some higher education. It doesn't read, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of Dallas Seminary..." Many will, for a multitude of reasons, attempt to wear the title of a pastor. Such a position I'm sure can look inviting from the outside where only the public persona is seen.

But Paul could absolutely wear the title! For he had lived through all the joys, the thrills, the attacks, trials, and the tribulations. He truly knew what it meant to experience the mountain top as well as the depth of valley despair. He had passed all the tests. He *was* an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Paul was an apostle because God willed it. It was just that simple and just that complicated! Many will take a job as a hireling pastor, but the only ones who are God's pastors are the ones He has called for the job, and they are there through thick and thin.

1:2-3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

“Grace to you.” This is not referring to God's “saving grace,” for they were already born again, rather this was in reference to the grace that sustains. That which holds us firm and unmovable. With the embrace of that grace comes the experience of true peace.

The whole matter of suffering makes us feel so vulnerable doesn't it? A lot of it is because we just can't seem to get ready for this stuff. God always will pour out His grace in such situations if we go to him, but we can't keep some emergency grace in our pocket to pull out like a swiss army knife and go all MacGyver to get past it. If we could, you know as well as I that we would trust ourselves and not the “God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10). All the resources that God gives us seem to be able to be socked away for future use...money, food, knowledge, etc...but the grace of God cannot be stored away. We only experience God's grace daily...moment by moment, and He is totally in control of divvy-ing it out...all we can do is seek Him for it when it all is coming down on our heads.

Isa 26:3 *“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.”*

1:4-5 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

Uhhh, wait just a second! We were doing so good there and now this? Tribulation? Suffering? Afflicted? What does this have to do with Christianity? ***Everything***. Truth is, we will do anything and everything to avoid it! We will deny its reality and attempt to rewrite the foundations of the faith to exclude such attributes.

We often need to be reminded that God is indeed there to comfort us through all that we will face. And we **will** face these issues! It is the truth and reality of Christianity! Paul uses the word “*pathēma*” here which indeed is translated correctly as “sufferings.” But this is the “sufferings” that are also attributed to Christ (1 Peter 1:11, 5:1), that Paul says that we now share. In Acts 5, the apostles “rejoiced” when they were beaten for their testimony of Christ. 1 Peter 4:12-13 even says *“Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad — for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.”*

See, we must never...as believers...think that our troubles are just an accident. We only have three ways to look at these things: *one*, it's all a product of fate and chance, and all we can do is throw our hands in the air and surrender. Or *two*, it is **our** doings...**our** control, and then our only recourse is to attempt to avoid all risk in hopes of dodging the bullet. But if it is the *third* option, then we trust God...rest in His control, and let Him teach us and get us through it as He sees fit. We have to see it all as a divine appointment. We must lose this modern falsehood that believes Christianity leads to a painless and peaceful life...that we can negotiate with God on these things as well as our obedience to them! He is a **Ruler**. He is the **King**. This isn't a drive through fast food joint where you can custom request your burger.

Yet scripture tells us that for enduring these things we will receive a reward, “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (4:17). One of the greatest blights ever perpetuated by the modern church is the lie that Christianity is somehow the new nirvana. “*Accept Christ and it all your troubles will melt away!*” Such ideas are the blatant work of Satan, and have spawned entire churches and church movements built on false premises. Sometimes it seems this lie has done more damage than the Satanic attacks we all recognize coming through the front door at us!

Caught in this trap are innumerable souls who drift from church to church until they find one that lulls them into a passive faith based on consumerism and comfort. These treasure hunters come here too from time to time. They come seeking affirmation, support for their worldly priorities, and a pat on the head. But after they listen to the teaching, wherein they hear passages and teaching like this, they start looking for the door. Occasionally, there will be the “needle in the proverbial haystack” that is willing to receive the truth and they stay.

So... *tribulation?* Yes. *Trouble?* Yes. *Suffering?* Yes. *Affliction?* Definitely. *Christ's comfort through it all?* You can depend on it. He promised all of it. We shouldn't be surprised. Verse 5 says that the “sufferings of Christ abound in us.” And if that isn't enough, I need to tell you that the full translation of that word is “*super-abound.*” But it seems the greater the onslaught, the greater the comfort, the more the consolation. Amen!

Why must we go through these things? It is because we have picked up His cross, and therefor now share in His suffering. Secondly, when *we* suffer, we have a real ability to comfort others in *their* suffering. We now can relate, we can share, we can console. We can love as Christ loves. We can embrace the ‘other-centered’ aspect of our faith.

1:6 *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.*

Whether we will accept it or not, most of the suffering we endure isn't even about me! It's for others and my ability thereafter to minister to them. Many folks will never grasp or receive this element of the faith.

Ro 8:36 “*Even the Scriptures say, ‘For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.’”*

Php 3:10 “*As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death.*”

1:7 *And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.*

Sufferings never travel alone for the child of God. Our Lord's comfort is promised to all of His children. This is where the church “body life” comes into focus. When we suffer individually, we suffer corporately. When we rejoice individually, we rejoice corporately. This is what we are called to as a body.

“*What a wonderful God we have—He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does He do this? So that when others are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them the same help and comfort God has given us. In our trouble God has comforted us—and this, too, to help you: to show you from our personal experience how God will tenderly comfort you when you un-dergo these same sufferings. He will give you the strength to endure.*” (LBV verse 3-7)

1:8-11 *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, 11 you also*

helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

Paul's service to the supreme God did not exempt him from trials and tribulation. What trouble Paul is specifically referring to we don't know. It is highly likely that it was this issue with Demetrius the silversmith in Acts 19 in the city of Ephesus. However, Paul's list is long and sordid, so it *could* be any number of such attacks upon his person. Such affronts to his physical and spiritual well-being were many, and moreover we no doubt have but a mere morsel of them recorded in scripture.

As I spoke of earlier, adversity goes with the territory. It will make you or break you. Therefor any follower of Christ...especially any pastor, that survives can only wear this as a badge of honor. Any man or woman of God that is worth their salt will have such battles and hardships. Because the fact remains that God does not always deliver us from such trials and certainly not always immediately. Back in Acts 12 James was beheaded and Peter was freed from prison. Both were delivered...just not according to our terms. Sometimes God will deliver us *from* our trials, and at other times he delivers us *in* our trials.

It is a hard acknowledgement to make, but if it all is handled righteously, God is glorified through our trials. When Paul reported to the church what God had done, there was praise and there was thanksgiving. When we stand...when we trust while in the midst of the storm, the world sees such and can only know that it is because of our God. The list goes on in this matter. No one likes the trials, but it is absolutely a part of the life of a faithful follower of Christ.

The testing Paul endured was not some doctrinal "splinter" or some local dislike of him. This was some serious stuff he had to face, and he would continue to endure this stuff until his mission was over. These were heavy battles he was having to deal with, and trials like these are not simply brushed aside.

They were *burdens* "beyond measure, above strength." They drove Paul to the point that he didn't think he would live through them. In such situations we either fold or trust in God. Many have thrown in the towel and abandoned ship. But for those of us that have died to our old lives and are now owned by the King...*we have no other option then to lean in and stand.* We have no other choice. We don't have the option to walk away. Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Christian Holocaust survivor who helped many Jews escape the Nazis during World War II, and writer of the autobiography, **The Hiding Place**, once said, "You'll never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have."