



Conducted by
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"In times of grief and adversity christians are supposed to be comforted by their faith. How does this comfort come?"

I have chosen this question because there are times in our lives when we all need to be comforted. Our loved ones die and leave us grief-stricken and desolate. We see the emaciated bodies of our brethren and friends and our hearts bleed because of the suffering they have to endure. Lines are etched on faces by anxiety and concern for those of our loved ones who may be passing through some of the traumatic experiences of life. The christian religion may very well be fertile soil for skilled and informed debate and discussion, but surely, it is in the dark and inhospitable days that the balm of God needs to be administered; when the scoring of debating points seems not to matter, and the fervent longing for love, compassion, and companionship seem to be all-important. Our God DOES administer the balm. We must present the wound to him..

Comfort through Christ

Comfort, by definition, means 'relief in affliction', 'consolation', 'conscious well-being'. Simeon, says the scripture 'was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel' (Luke 2:25) For what, or whom, was Simeon waiting? Well, the Holy Spirit told him 'that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ' (v 26). Is Jesus our consolation? It was he who said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest".

Have you ever, in your mind's eye, seen Jesus bowed beneath the weight of the cross, bearing it to the place of crucifixion? When those languid eyes were turned upon his tormentors did they see the love and compassion there, yes, even for them? The sufferings that we have to endure are very real, acute, and painful, and we should never try to minimise them. But surely Jesus can help us? He can console and comfort. He did to Paul and his companions, because Paul was able to say, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 Cor. 1:5).

Comfort through the Holy Spirit

Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus said, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). This Comforter is the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16 Jesus said "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever". You will notice the word 'another'. This reiterates what we have said, that Jesus is our comforter as well.

When translating for Holy Spirit, the translators have given us such translations as, 'helper', 'advocate'. From the word PARAKLEETOS we have the word 'Comforter'. Perhaps the thought is; 'one to help, like an advocate'. That being true, we understand that the Spirit stays by our side to assist us in life's struggles. He helps us in our weaknesses, said Paul when he wrote to the church at Rome, because we many times don't know what to pray for, but He takes our prayers and presents them to God in a way which is favourable to us. When Paul wrote to Ephesus he said, "That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:16-19). That is help indeed. Out of weakness into strength because of the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Comfort through the Scriptures

Paul, in his Roman letter, said, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4) It is obvious that if we do not read the Word of God then we shall not receive any comfort from that direction. Isn't it very true that it is we who limit the power of God in our lives. Many faithful christians will testify to the fact that when depressed and disconsolate, they have turned to the Word, and there, leaping from its pages with steady light, they have found hope and encouragement.

Brethren, let us not be tempted to use the Bible as a textbook. It is the mine wherein are found jewels precious and rare. It is the bridge over troubled waters. It is the ratified treaty of God with man. It is divine in concept, precept, and culmination. It is hope and encouragement, and therefore, it is comfort.

Comfort through the Brethren

When Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Thessalonica he gave us some teaching on fellowship. He said, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do" (1 Thess. 5:9-11).

Why does it take distress, adversity, and grief to bring out the best aspects of fellowship? There is not a brother or sister that I know who would not compassionately help his or her fellow brethren in their hour of need. Their concern would be genuine and their desire to comfort absolute. Yet the tragedy of our days is that at other times these same brethren exhibit bitterness and rancour because of so-called doctrinal disputes.

Why do we have to wait until it is too late before we show our true feelings of love and concern? Why do the tears have to wet the coffin when that same emotion could evoke a similar response from someone while they are still living? In a hard and unrelenting world aren't the brethren the only ones we have to hang on to in times of trouble? God hath not appointed us to wrath but to SALVATION' Therefore, let us comfort ourselves together. Let it be said today, 'See how these christians love each other'.

Conclusion

God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Word, the brethren. Was there ever a more formidable array of sources of comfort than these? The great thing is that they are all available to the individual christian. Let us turn the putrefying sores of distress into wounds which are cleanly healed by comfort and love. And if we turn to the Church and do not find there the balm, peace and comfort that we expect, then let us work within the Church to produce these, because by God's grace, the comfort and peace that we can generate might be the means of motivating our brethren to do the same.