

In reading the first chapter of 2 Corinthians we see a section in there that talks repeatedly of affliction and comfort. In verses 3-7 we read:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.*

Four short verses, he mentions the word affliction or suffering 7 times and the word comfort 10 times. The word comfort comes from a word which means strength and is also the root of the words fortify and fortress. It is not just a restful luxury, but a strengthening of spirit to bear the afflictions or sufferings. It is obviously an important point for him to repeat it so many times. Another important idea found here is the fellowship or sharing of these two things. Reread verse 5: *“For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”*

It is hard to separate this strength that we receive from the idea of sharing part of the sufferings of Christ. Paul gives this same idea in Colossians 1:24, *“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”* The image that I get here is that Christ endured the death and suffering of the cross, but the church, his body, must yet endure much more to finish the task Christ began. Paul is like a man in thirst ready to put his cup beneath the faucet of suffering, eager in his will to share if he could with Christ. This sharing is really a natural part of love, and it should be a part of our love for Christ.

We must, then, be comforted in our hope of the gospel as we endure the many trials of life. God gives us this strength, but sometimes he delivers it by way of those around us who share our faith and love for Christ. One of my favorite scriptures is Colossians 2:2, which speaks of our hearts being knit together in love. Another scripture along this line is Romans 12:15, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”* We all need to knit our hearts together so that when one thread is pulled, the whole fabric keeps that thread from being pulled out.

The next section of 1 Corinthians 1 is also very rewarding. Read verses 8-11:

*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.*

Paul talks about his life at this time as if he had lived it inside a pressure cooker, the pressure becoming so great that he thought that he would reach the breaking point. Then he says that God delivered him from it, and enabled him to endure, to survive, past that breaking point. This we can all do with the strength that God gives us. Paul tells us that this experience was given to him so that he might realize that he did not have the strength on his own to bear his affliction, but must rely totally on the power of God to deliver. Many times in our own lives, know that we feel like there is nothing that can save us, that we cannot bear up under the load. It feels like a burden to us, crushing us like the weight of a piano falling on us. But we emphasize again Phillipians 4:13, *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*