

F.B. Meyer:

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort - 2 Corinthians 1:4

Child of God, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which tries thee, as though some strange thing had happened. Rejoice, inasmuch as it is a sure sign that thou art on the right track. All the saints have gone by this road, notably the writer of this Epistle.

Its keyword is affliction, because written amid afflictions so great that the apostle despaired of life. It is steeped in affliction, as a handkerchief with the flowing blood of a fresh wound. But in this passage the apostle has built himself a little chamber of comfort, the stones of which were quarried from the pit of his own sorrow. He blesses God, who had led him into affliction to teach him the art of comfort, that by observing how God comforted, he might become proficient in the art.

The world is full of comfortless hearts---orphan children crying in the night. Our God pities them, and would comfort them through thee. But ere thou undertake this lofty ministry thou must be trained, and thou must therefore pass through the very trials that they are exposed to. Now watch how God comforts thee. Keep a diary, if thou wilt, of His procedure. Ponder in thine heart the length of each splint, the folds of each bandage, the ministration of each opiate, cordial, or drug. This will have a twofold effect, in turning thy thoughts from thy miseries to thy mercies, and in taking away the sense of useless and aimless existence.

There is evidently scope for comfort even in heaven, for it is said that God will wipe away tears from all faces. Oh thou that art sorrowful even unto death, be sure that some day the Comforter will get the victory over thy sorest griefs.

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ - 2 Corinthians 2:15

The idea is borrowed from an ancient Roman triumph, which to the eyes of the world of that day was the most glorious spectacle which the imagination could conceive. The apostle compares himself first to one of the prisoners led in long chains behind the conqueror's chariot; then to a servant bearing incense; and lastly to the incense itself that rose all along the line of the procession.

Nothing touches the sense more quickly than sweet odors, unless it be noxious ones; and they almost instantly recall some scene of the past with which they were indissolubly associated. For instance, the scent of new-mown hay will carry us off to merry scenes in the far away days of childhood. Thus the apostle wished that his life might be a sweet perfume, floating on the air, reminding men, and above all reminding God, of Christ. It was as though he said, "I desire so to live that I may perpetually remind God of the obedience, sacrifice, and devotion of the Lord Jesus, so that my words and deeds may recall to His heart similar ones in the earthly life of Jesus."

A sweet savor of Christ! It does not consist so much in what we do, but in our manner of doing it; not so much in our words or deeds, as in an indefinable sweetness, tenderness, courtesy, unselfishness, and desire to please others to their edification. It is the breath and fragrance of a life hidden with Christ in God, and deriving its aroma from fellowship with Him. Wrap the habits of your soul in the sweet lavender of your Lord's character.

The secret of abounding joy in self-sacrifice is the happy consciousness, such as Enoch had, that we have pleased God. To have this is to secure deliverance from self-consciousness.

Beholding as in a glass - 2 Corinthians 3:18

Moses veiled his face, and the veiled lawgiver was characteristic of the dispensation he inaugurated. It was a partial revelation, gleaming through a veil, expressing truths in rites and types and symbols. But Christ has torn away the veil, removed the fences of the mount of vision, and revealed to babes the deepest secrets of God's heart. The apostle's phrase is characteristic of Christianity, "Behold, I show you (i e., unveil) a mystery."

The object of visions.--"The glory of the Lord." Concerning which we may accept the statement of a trustworthy commentator, that the reference is not to the incomprehensible, incommunicable lustre of the absolute Divine perfectness; but to that glory which, as John says, tabernacled in the Lord Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth--the glory of loving, pitying words and lovely deeds; the glory of faultless and complete manhood; the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The nature of the vision.--"We behold." It is true that we cannot see. "Whom, not having seen, ye love." But it is also true that the heart has eyes, by which it looks away unto Jesus. "Seeing is believing," is a familiar proverb among men; but "believing is seeing" is a true aphorism of the spirit which clings to the Lord by its faith and love.

The effect of the vision.--First, we reflect. The beauty of His face glancing on ours will be mirrored, as a man's eye will contain a tiny miniature picture of what he is beholding. Then we shall be changed. If you try to represent Jesus in your character and behavior, you will become transfigured into His likeness. Love makes like. Imitation produces assimilation. Reflect and resemble.

While we look . . . at the things which are not seen - 2 Corinthians 4:18

We are here bidden to look through the things which are seen; to consider them as the glass window through which we pass to that which is behind and beyond. You do not waste your time by admiring the frame or casket of some rare jewel, but penetrate to the jewel itself; so, day by day, look through the material and transient to the eternal purpose, the Divine idea, the deep that lieth under.

"All visible things," said Carlyle, "are emblems. What thou seest is not there on its own account; strictly speaking, is not there at all. Matter exists only spiritually, and to represent some idea and body it forth." This is an exaggerated way of stating the old saying, "Everything that is, is double." Both, however, illustrate the affirmation of the text.

Look for God's thought in all the incidents, circumstances, and objects of your daily life. Do not stop at the outward; penetrate to the inward and eternal. Beneath that bitter physical suffering there are stores of Divine fortitude and grace. Beneath that trying dispensation there are celestial compensations. Beneath those sweet family ties there are suggestions of love and friendship, which can never grow old or pass away. Beneath the letter of Scripture is the spirit; beneath the ordinance, oneness with the loving Saviour; beneath the world of nature, the processes of the eternal husbandry.

When such is the attitude of the soul, afflictions, that might otherwise have weighed as heavy, become light; and those that drag through long and tedious years, seem but for a moment. And without exception, they all go to produce that receptivity of character that can contain the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

All things are of God - 2 Corinthians 5:18

Of here is equivalent to out of. All the precious contents of the Gospel have emanated from the heart of God; so that we may say with the psalmist, "All my springs are in Thee."

That we have a building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, to which to go when the earthly house of this tabernacle is broken up; that it is possible for the mortal to be swallowed up in the descending glory of the Second Advent; that we have received the Spirit as earnest of our future glory; that we shall be one day at home with the Lord; that One died for all that the dominion of the self-life should be destroyed, and that they should henceforth live, not to themselves, but to Him; that it is possible to become a new creation in Christ; that God is already reconciled to the world of men, and is only waiting for them to be reconciled to Him; that He hath committed to men the ministry of reconciliation, and commissioned them to be His ambassadors; that it is possible for us to be the righteousness of God in Jesus--all these things have issued from His heart of love.

Oh for a soul as wide as the utmost circle of the highest heaven that containeth all, to contain His love! Oh, world's wonder! Oh, what a sight to be up in heaven, in "the fair orchard of Paradise!" But the very greatness of His provisions will make our doom the greater, if we refuse or ignore them. The men who made light of the king's invitation had their city burned. This is the terror of the Lord; and our duty is to beseech men not to put away the reconciliation which God offers. Let the "all things" of your life be of God's direction, impulse, and inspiration.

As deceivers, and yet true - 2 Corinthians 6:8

This is the first clause in one of the most wonderful series of paradoxes in all literature. Let us class together these different conceptions of the apostle, as held by those who judged him by his outward and inward life respectively.

Judged from the view-point of this age he was a deceiver, intent on some purpose of his own, misleading and hoodwinking his converts. In the annals of this world he was utterly unknown, and there was no attempt to chronicle his doings or record his words. His life seemed to the gay and worldly a prolonged death, whilst to his close associates and friends it was a perpetual chastening. Very sorrowful, very poor, very destitute--such was his appearance as seen from the outside. And many must have turned from it and felt thankful that the lines had fallen to them in pleasanter places.

Judged from the view--point of eternity he was known to be true, and building the temple of truth. By every new dying to the world around, his inner life was being recruited, deepened, and purified. His sufferings were chastening and pruning him, that he might bear more fruit. Amid his outward griefs he was ever drinking at the wells of purest joy; amid his poverty he was enriching the world with the most precious wealth; amid his utter destitution he was handling the imperishable riches of eternity.

The monks of Chartreux, when they first erected their monastery, made all their windows look in on the small inner court, but had none commanding the sublime mountains and glaciers around. So, too, many lives are always contemplating the trifles of earth's court-yard! Oh that such would take into their view the unseen and eternal!

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness - 2 Corinthians 7:1

The closing paragraph of the previous chapter tells us what this defilement stands for; and in the enumeration note the increasing bonds of approximation which each word indicates. An unequal yoke in ill-matched intercourse with unbelievers leads to fellowship, and this to communion, and this again to concord, and this to partnership; whilst the culmination of the entire series is agreement, and the yielding up of the body for the possession and indwelling of idols. let us beware of the beginning of this awful approximation. It is impossible to stand still; and they who think lightly of marrying an unbeliever may in the end hear words like those which watchers heard spoken in the doomed temple on the night before it fell into the hands of Titus. "There was, as it were, the rushing of wings, and voices were heard saying, Let us depart."

There is not only defilement of the flesh, but of the spirit. It is not enough to avoid the gross sins of the outward life. Those of the inner temple and disposition are equally abhorrent to the holiness of God. We must come out and be separate from the latter as well as the former, or we shall never realize what God means when He promises to receive us, and to be a Father to us.

The word cleanse is very decisive in the Greek. It calls for sudden, decisive action; and if you answer, that sin is too closely interwoven with your nature to be thus summarily disposed of, remember that God demands our will only. Directly we are perfectly willing and eager, He steps in and does all the rest. At unknown depths the Spirit of God is at work within us; let us work out what He works in, that we may be welcomed to God's heart.

See that ye abound in this grace also - 2 Corinthians 8:7

The grace of liberality is as much a gift of God as faith, or utterance, or knowledge, or love. This is implied in our text, and distinctly stated in the first verse, where the apostle says that he desires to make known the grace of God, which had been given to the churches of Macedonia, so that they were able in their deep poverty to abound in riches of liberality. In the ninth verse we learn that this grace first dwelt in our blessed Lord, who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich. If yours is a grudging, niggard nature, be sure to appropriate the royal nature of the Lord Jesus, that it may fill and possess you.

Probably there is no greater test of our true religion than our behavior in giving. How few, comparatively, give in proportion to their income! How few give systematically! How few have learned the joy and luxury of giving, so that they abound therein! This arises partly because they do not realize that they are stewards of God's property, and that He expects them to devote all they own to Him, keeping back only a necessary percentage for themselves and their families, as a steward might who was farming an estate for his absent master. And partly it arises from mistrust of God, and the fear that some day there may be a sudden falling off of supplies. Oh that each reader would consider that all is God's, and begin by always giving a certain proportion of every pound, so as to be sure of not robbing God of His own. Pray day and night that you may abound in this grace also; and then, in faith that God is answering your prayer, begin to do violence to your churlish, niggard nature. What though it protest-- Give.

He that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for [your] food - 2 Corinthians 9:10

In every harvest there is a twofold object. First, the supply of seed for the next autumn's sowing, and then of food for those that sow or reap; so in the spiritual sphere God will not fail either sowers or reapers.

All sowers must eat.--However much wheat has passed through the sower's hands, he is not fed thereby. At night he returns hungry to his home. So we, who are engaged in the work of God, cannot live on what we do for the world around. After the most fruitful day of service, we need to take our Bibles and feed our famished souls by meditation and prayer. We must not mistake the glow and exhilaration of the sanctuary for nourishment. They are rather a stimulant. Therefore we may expect God to increase the fruits of our righteousness. Shall Boaz cause handfuls on purpose to fall for Ruth, and shall not God supply our need? Will the Father not provide bread to those who are engaged in tilling His fields?

All eaters should sow.--It would never do for the farmer to live on all the produce of his fields. He must sow a certain proportion of his grain. And nothing is more foreign to the genius of true religion than to be always nursing and ministering to oneself; eating the fine wheat of the Gospel, but not sowing it in other hearts; consuming the consolations of the Divine Spirit, but not endeavoring to pass them on to others. Oh ye who have eaten bountifully, sow bountifully; else ye shall suffer the results of spiritual repletion and indigestion. And note this precious assurance, that God will supply seed for daily and weekly sowing for the congregation and the class; and that He will multiply it when sown.

Bringing every thought into . . . The obedience of Christ - 2 Corinthians 10:5

The apostle is planning a campaign; his words glow with the fire of military enthusiasm: but, as one has eloquently said, the weapons of his warfare are not carnal; the standard under which he fights is a more sacred sign than that of Caesar; the territory he invades is more difficult of conquest than any which kept the conquerors of the world at bay. He sees rising before him the lofty fortresses of hostile error; they must be reduced or razed. Every mountain fastness to which the enemy can retreat must be scaled and destroyed; and every thought of the soul, which is hostile to the authority of the Divine Truth, must become a prisoner in the camp of Christ.

Be sure to distinguish between the proper use of the intellect by the man who recognizes its necessary limitations and uses it in the humble and reverent inquiry after truth, and that undue exaltation of the intellect, which sets itself on high as the ultimate judge of truth, or which roams wildly, unheeding the Divine control. There are vain thoughts, sensual thoughts, cynical and self-reliant thoughts, sceptical thoughts, proud thoughts, wandering and wayward thoughts; but the apostle says that, however strongly they fortify themselves against Christ, they should and must be brought into captivity. Paul once thought he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus, but became His humble disciple.

The intellect has its province, but faith has hers; and while the intellect tends to exalt man, faith humbles him and leads him captive in the chains of love. We must come with absolute obedience to Christ, that every vail may be torn away, and whatever blurs the clear surface of the mirroring intellect may be removed.

In perils - 2 Corinthians 11:20

This enumeration was made before the imprisonment at Caesarea and the voyage to Rome. How little do we know of Paul's life, after all! Every victory was hardly fought for and dearly won.

These sufferings attest the truth of Christianity. Whenever a doubt crosses your mind with respect to the Resurrection, or any other Gospel fact, say to yourself, Paul knew everything that could be said against it. He was in the secrets of the Sanhedrim; and if he believed it, we certainly may. And he had nothing to gain by his witness. It was to his great loss, and the shattering of his position in Israel, that he became a Christian.

These sufferings approve the genuineness of Paul's character.--This age is athirst for biography; it loves to read the story of its great men; but sometimes we ask whether they are just as real and good and pure as we have been led to hope. There is one life at least about which no such inquiry can be raised. The severest tests may be applied to this diamond, but it shines only the brighter--a very Koh-i-noor, "A mountain of light."

These sufferings approve the power of the Holy Spirit.--Such love had He inspired toward the Blessed Lord in the heart of the apostle, that he counted the loss of all things gain, and the uncounted sorrows of his lot as light and but for a moment, if only he might win Christ, and know Him, and be found in Him. You cannot explain a life

like this apart from the mighty power and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. What a puzzle the Christian presents to the world! I remember how a poor child of fashion and sin kept asking me once, "What do you Christians get?" It was quite impossible to explain.

When I am weak, then am I strong - 2 Corinthians 12:10

We need not discuss the nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh. It is enough that he calls it "a stake," as though he had been impaled. It must have, therefore, been very painful. It must also have been physical, because he could not have prayed thrice for the removal of a moral taint, and been refused. It came from Satan, permitted by God, as in the case of Job, to buffet his servant. It is not unlikely that he suffered from weak eyes, or some distressing form of ophthalmia; hence the eagerness of the Galatian converts to give him their eyes (see Gal 4:15).

God does not take away our thorns, but He communicates sufficient grace. He always answers prayer, though not as we expect. Let the music of these tender words soar unto thee, poor sufferer! "My grace is sufficient even for thee." Sufficient when friends forsake, and foes pursue; sufficient to make thee strong against an infuriated crowd and a tyrannical judge; sufficient for excessive physical exertion and spiritual conflict; sufficient to enable thee to do as much work, and even more, than if health and vigor were not impaired, because the very weakness of our nature is the chosen condition under which God will manifest the strength of His.

Do not sit down before that mistaken marriage, that uncongenial business, that physical weakness, as though thy life must be a failure; but take in large reinforcements of that Divine grace which is given to the weak and to those who have no might. It is clear that Paul had reached such a condition, that it was a matter of deep congratulation to him to be deficient in much that men hold dear, and to have what most men dread. He rejoiced in all that diminished creature-might and strengthened his hold on God.

The communion of the Holy Ghost - 2 Corinthians 13:14

How often these words are uttered without any real appreciation of their depth of meaning! The word communion signifies having in common. It is used of our fellowship with one another (1Co 10:16) and with God (1Jo 1:3). The bond of such fellowship is always through the Holy Spirit. As the ocean unites all lands, and is the medium through which they are able to exchange commodities, so does the blessed Spirit unite the Persons of the Blessed Trinity to each other, and us to them, and secures that oneness for which our Saviour prayed.

How wonderful it is to have the privilege of this Divine fellowship! That we need never be alone again; that we can at any moment turn to Him for advice and direction; that we may draw on His resources for the supply of every need; that it is impossible to exhaust or even tax His willingness to counsel and succor; that there is no kind of service or suffering into which He is not prepared to enter with us! Surely, if we would but give ourselves time to realize this marvellous fact, there would be no room for the despondency which at times threatens to deprive us of heart and hope.

Of course, we must be very careful of the tender sensibilities and holy disposition of our divine Confederate. We cannot ruthlessly grieve Him by our harshness or impurity at one moment, and turn to Him for His succor and direction at the next. Such divine union as lies within our reach certainly demands on our part watchfulness, a tender conscience, a yielded and pliant will, a heart which has no other love, no affection nor idol inconsistent with the Spirit's fellowship