

Purpose in Suffering

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 *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.* 5 *For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.* 6 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. 7 *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.*

8 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. 9 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.* 10 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, 11 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.

12 Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. 13 For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, 14 as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

15 Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. 16 I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. 17 When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

18 But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." 20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. 21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. *He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

23 I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

We call this Second Corinthians, but it should, perhaps, be called Fourth Corinthians, because it is the last of four letters that Paul wrote to the church there. Two of these letters have not been preserved for us -- that is why we only have First and Second Corinthians -- but they are not in the order that these titles suggest. If I can just recapitulate a little bit of the background, at least this one time, then you can refer back to this if you are confused about the chronology.

Paul began the church in Corinth somewhere around 52 or 53 A. D. He stayed there for about a year and a half; then he went to Ephesus, where he remained for a few weeks, and then he went on a quick trip to Jerusalem, returning again to Ephesus.

While he was at Ephesus, he wrote a letter to the church at Corinth which is lost to us. It is referred to in First Corinthians 5:9, where Paul says he wrote to warn them about following a worldly lifestyle. In response to that letter, the Corinthians wrote back to him with many questions. They sent their letter by the hands of three young men who are mentioned in First Corinthians. In reply to that letter, Paul wrote what we now call First Corinthians. In it he tried to answer their questions, and we have looked at those answers. He tried to exhort them and instruct them how to walk in power and in peace; and he tried to correct many problem areas in the church. Evidently that letter did not accomplish all that Paul intended. There was a bad reaction to it, and in this second letter we learn that he made a quick trip back to Corinth. How long that took we do not know. Paul calls it a "painful" visit. He had come with a rather sharp, severe rebuke to them, but again he did not accomplish his purpose; again there was a great deal of negative reaction.

So when he returned to Ephesus, he sent another brief letter, in the hands of Titus, to Corinth to see if he could help them. Now Titus was gone a long time. Transportation and communication were very slow and difficult in those days. Paul, waiting in Ephesus, grew very anxious to hear what was happening in the church there. He became so troubled that he left Ephesus and went to Troas and then up into Macedonia to meet Titus. There in Macedonia, probably in the city of Philippi, he and Titus came together. Titus brought him a much more encouraging word about the church, and in response to that, out of thanksgiving, Paul wrote what we now call the Second Corinthians letter, although it was really the fourth of a series of letters.

Why Do We Suffer?

OT

1. Fallen world and other sinful people bring suffering.
2. Judgment of God on sinful men.
3. Our own bad choices.

2 Cor 1:4-11

1. That you might discover the inner strengthening that can keep your heart at peace, no matter what the pressure is. (v5) *For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows*
2. Your sufferings are not sent for you so much as they are for someone who is watching you, and seeing how you handle the pressure that you are going through. (v6-7) 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.*
3. To break the stubborn spirit of self-will within us that insists on trying to work it all out by our own resources, or run to some other human resource, or in some way refuse to acknowledge that we need divine help. (v9) 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.*
4. Suffering is sent to us to show us that we are not individuals living all alone in life. We are members of a family, we are members of a Body, and we need each other. (v10-11) On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 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.