

THE FATHER OF MERCIES

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1 – 3



~ Our Spiritual Safari completed Nehemiah in our last report, and, in this report, we rejoin the apostle Paul in Philippi as he writes his second epistle to the church in Corinth. We have previously examined Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians; which dealt with proper conduct for church members. If we didn't have that first epistle record, we wouldn't know much about church government or the manner in which a church should present itself in the world. However, this epistle deals with ministerial functions in the body of believers. So, we're considering an entirely different subject in this letter.

Now, honestly — because I am always honest with you dear readers, this epistle from the apostle Paul deals with so many deep and profound topics — things which only the Holy Spirit can make real to us — that I feel wholly inadequate to teach this section of Scripture. I feel as if I am setting myself up for total and complete failure. I'm sure it won't come as a shock to anyone when I say the more I study the Bible — and this epistle in particular — the more I realize I don't really know very much about the Word of God.

Further, second Corinthians is wholly neglected by the modern-day church. It rarely receives proper attention in modern Bible study programs. So, we're going to spend some time considering it. Paul wrote this letter shortly after he wrote first Corinthians. First Corinthians was written from Ephesus, where he was engaged in a tremendous ministry. Paul said from Ephesus, "*.... a great door is open, but, there are many adversaries.*" It would seem Paul's finest ministry was in Asia Minor; with Ephesus being the spring-board for the Gospel. It seems the Gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was taught more effectively at Ephesus during that time than any other place or time in history — up to and including today.

Because Paul had reached Asia Minor, he wasn't compelled to return to Corinth — and the church there was filled with carnal Christians that were nothing but a bunch of babies anyways. Of course, they wanted Paul to come back and give them his full attention; and they were crying for him like the little brats they were. Naturally, they were miffed and hurt, and they perceived Paul to be shunning and neglecting them. They should have been supporting Paul's missionary ministry of advancing the Gospel throughout the entire world, but carnal Christians are only ever concerned with themselves. In the first letter Paul wrote to them, he said he would see them later; but he didn't go to them later — and that disturbed them. So, Titus, who had been sent to Corinth in Paul's place, went to Macedonia — that is, Philippi — to meet Paul there.

2 Corinthians 2: ¹² *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,* ¹³ *I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia ~*

Titus brought Paul news — and it was good news — and the answers that the Corinthians had given regarding Paul's instructions in his first letter to them. That's what prompted writing this second epistle. What we see in this epistle is the great apostle Paul opening his heart in a most wonderful way. In these twenty reports from our safari, we're going to get to know Paul better than at any other place in the entire Word of God. This heals the breach that had, apparently, come between Paul and the church at Corinth.

Our expedition does not outline the books of the Bible as a normal Bible study would; because we're not after the theological or the doctrinal aspect of the Word of God — only the spiritual. This is the most unorganized letter Paul wrote — period. If we did outline the books as we go, this would be the most difficult to outline. Either way, the personal details of Paul's life permeate every chapter. Further, each chapter has minor themes that seem to overshadow the major theme — and that makes it a little confusing for some people. The good news is that the disorganization contains striking stand-alone verses.

This epistle offers us the utmost comfort from the Spirit of God in our Christian life. Paul meets us personally where we live today. It also entails the collection taken up for the poor saints in Jerusalem – which is always a most uncomfortable subject for saints. Christian giving is a subject we're going to learn all about in these reports. After that, we're going to consider, in deep detail, Paul's contribution to the ministry. If these reports are a disappointment to you, just remember I said *WAY* back here in report number one that I find it nearly impossible to teach this in a way that takes us to the dizzyingly high spiritual plane the Lord desires to take us to as we examine this epistle....

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

² Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

~ We begin on a super-high note as Paul says he is an apostle by the *authority* of the Lord Jesus Christ. Period. Full stop. Friends, if a man cannot teach the Bible with total authority in Christ, he has no place in any type of ministry work. There is absolutely no point attempting to give out the Word of God unless we are one hundred percent convinced of its inspiration, infallibility, truth, and authoritative accuracy *by experience*. Ignoring that critical formula is another huge mistake being made in the church today.

Many people aren't sure about this so-called safari. Most people question most of the statements I make. Others are convinced of a peanut theology they have constructed from select irrelevant verses they memorized back in kindergarten – but that's a whole other problem we'll get to later in the Bible. The first thing the early church said was, "*.... oh, Lord, Thou art God!*" If you aren't sure God is God, then you just don't happen to be sure of anything! That means being sure the Bible is the Word of God — and resting upon it and in it at all times. To rest in Holy Writ, we have to actually

know what it teaches. So, with that declaration of authority, Paul begins this epistle.

See, you can't get any higher than the will of God – because that's impossible. If what you are doing is by the will of God, then there won't be any question in your mind about it. When we are in the will of God, it matters not where we are, how we are; and our circumstances become irrelevant to our existential being. That is a wonderful and glorious place to attain to, by the way. It may be that you are lying all alone in a hospital bed dying of cancer; well, if that's the will of God for your life, then that's the best possible place you can be. I know this isn't easy medicine to process – but – this is what's real. It's truly wonderful to be in the will of God, friends; it's the best business you could get in, that's for sure. You may win the lottery and become a millionaire overnight; but, if that's not the will of God for your life – you won't find it as thrilling as a proper, correct and complete ministry — Personally ordained by God the Father.

Well, Paul is writing to the church of God. I hear people say, “... *my church*” – and I have said that, too – but – when we start acting like the church is *OUR* church, we lose sight of God. We all do well to keep in mind that the Lord Jesus paid for the church with His Blood. Many Christians seem to forget the high price Christ paid for the church. That's the current condition overall in the church in this day in which we live — and they're cheap. Well, that was the condition of the church of Corinth, too. Verse one doesn't confine it to Corinth, though; Paul extends it to all Achaia. Somehow, amazingly, many were still won to Christ at this time.

Verses one and two are the introduction to this epistle; and verse three is where we begin to see the comfort of God in His plan for our lives. “Blessed” means “praise” in verse three; praise be to God. I wonder how much of what we call praising God is really praising Him today. Frankly, I find I do a better job praising God writing these reports than I do in my church. David said, “... *I will praise God at all times and His praise shall be continually in my mouth.*” If we all did that, it would clean up most of the complaining and whining in the church. God says, “*whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Me.*” The position of God in the Trinity is the Father. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; “begotten” means

He also occupies a position in the Godhead Trinity; and that is of the eternal Son of the everlasting Father. In that sense, there is no thought or reference to what we know as being born physically.

We hear a lot about “love” today – actually, there is an overemphasis on love to the point where it just becomes a sloppy and meaningless term of endearment. Many people erroneously believe God is saving people by love. Now, if we really knew how much God loves us, it would literally break our hearts; but we aren’t saved by love! Scripture says, “.... *by grace are ye saved.*” Grace means “unmerited favor” – meaning “*we don’t deserve to be saved.*” God loves humanity, so He provided a Savior for us. There is no other way we can be saved. See, God is holy and perfect, and He demands holiness and perfection – but you and I can never offer either one of those in exchange for our salvation.

Anything we have in this life — or will ever have — is a mercy from God. That’s different from a blessing. I don’t have much down here on earth, but I do have His mercy; and that’s what I need. Do you need mercy today? I need a *lot* of mercy; but I will also tell you I don’t deserve mercy. The simple fact that the Lord allows me to write these reports is merciful to me because – well, you don’t know me like I know me. If you knew me like I know me, you would never read any of these reports – but wait. If I knew you like you know you, I wouldn’t waste my time writing to you. This may be hard to understand, but the sorrow and poverty I am in is a *mercy* from God – I know it’s hard for us to say that – but I know it’s true. We’re going to learn all of this in no uncertain terms in this epistle as we travel forward together.

So, as we close out this report from our Spiritual Safari, let’s test all of this in the crucible of life. We mentioned the acid of suffering. God can comfort us when we’re sick and He can comfort us when we’re dying. The Holy Spirit can comfort us in *ANY* place and at *ANY* time; because He is the God of all comfort. However, there is an authentic comfort, and there is a counterfeit comfort. I don’t believe the pious person who says “.... *oh, yes, the Lord has permitted these problems to happen to me, so I just accept it*” – when they *DON’T* accept it. That’s false witness. If you look closely at their lives, they are generally in total and complete rebellion towards God.

We need to learn how to tell God what we think and how to be honest with Him. If there is something you don't like about your life, then tell Him you don't like it. He wants us to do that – and He already knows all about it anyways. And He wants to do something about the problem, too! So, comfort can be genuine, but it can be utterly phony, also.

The popular notion of needing comfort is stigmatized as a weakness or sentimental shortcoming. I envision a mother sitting down next to her child and kissing the bruise the kid just got from falling off of his bike – or patting them on the back and telling them everything is going to be okay when they are disappointed. That may have a place, but that's *NOT* what we're talking about here, friends. The Greek verb means "*Paraclete*" – and that means "*advocate or helper.*" Most people have absolutely no clue about the ministry of the third Person of the Godhead. Again, we're going to learn all about the Spirit of God in this second epistle to the Corinthians.

The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "*I'll not leave you comfortless.*" That means He isn't going to abandon us and leave us as orphans. Jesus also said, "*if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you.*" Well, Jesus went away, and Jesus sent the Comforter. Our Comforter is not One Who kisses our bruises, though; but, rather, He is our strengthener, our power, and our advocate. Only He can relieve the loneliness, assuage the grief, and calm our fears – and meet our needs. Most precisely, God now reveals help in the times of terrifying trouble. Hear us, oh, Lord, and have mercy on us! Hear us, oh, Lord and remember us for good! ~

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