

A God's comfort in suffering

- ❖ Second Corinthians is the epistle in which Paul speaks most extensively about comfort. The church was going through a difficult time, and Paul's previous letter had plunged them into a state of sadness.
- ❖ But that sorrow was “godly,” leading to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). So Paul does not want that sorrow to overwhelm them, but rather that they be comforted.
- ❖ He himself had gone through times when his own life had been at risk and he had become discouraged (2 Cor. 1:8-10). But God comforted him, and now he transmits that comfort to the church (2 Cor. 1:6).
- ❖ God's comfort frees us from fear; it reminds us of the times He has helped us; it helps us to endure affliction; it leads us to spiritual maturity; it encourages us to intercede for others; and we comfort as we were comforted by God.

B Holiness and sincerity in ministry

- ❖ Some people looked down on Paul, accusing him of being weak and indecisive (2 Cor. 10:10). For this reason, and so that his advice would be received and accepted, it was necessary for the apostle to defend himself against such accusations.
- ❖ As a man, he considered himself insignificant (Eph. 3:8). But, by the grace of God, he could boast of having a clear conscience (2 Cor. 1:12). He and his associates could confidently say that their conduct was holy and sincere [pure], both in the church and outside of it.
- ❖ For this reason, Paul's writings were free of hidden intentions. He hoped that these letters would be read and understood in that context of holiness and sincerity—that is, written out of love for them and seeking only their good (2 Cor. 1:13-14).

C To behave wisely

- ❖ In his first letter, Paul informed the Corinthians of the itinerary he planned to follow (1 Cor. 16:5-11): Ephesus — Macedonia — Corinth — Judea.
- ❖ In a later letter (lost, 2 Cor. 7:8) he informed them that he would visit them twice (2 Cor. 1:15-16): Ephesus — Corinth — Macedonia — Corinth — Judea.
- ❖ However, he had changed his plans and decided not to make that first visit (2 Cor. 1:23). These changes led some to criticize him for being unstable and vacillating. Why had he changed his mind?
- ❖ Paul's presence in Corinth seemed necessary because of the problems there. But the opposition he would encounter implied a confrontation that he wanted to avoid, because of the great love he had for them (2 Cor. 2:1-4).

D Forgiveness and restoration

- ❖ While Paul was on his way to Troas, Titus went to Corinth. From Troas, Paul went to Macedonia. But he was greatly distressed because Titus had not met him in Troas to give him news about the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12-13).
- ❖ Shortly afterwards, Titus finally met Paul in Macedonia. He told him how the church had reacted very favorably to the apostle's admonitions (2 Cor. 7:5-9, 13-16).
- ❖ One of the issues they needed to resolve concerned church discipline. Obeying the apostle, the offending party had been rebuked, and they had accepted the rebuke. Now, Paul asks them to take the next step: forgiveness and restoration (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

E The fragrance of Christ

- ❖ Commenting on how God “opened a door” for the gospel to be successfully preached in Troas, Paul bursts into a shout of praise and victory: “But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere”. (2 Cor. 2:14).
- ❖ Like an all-pervading fragrance, the knowledge of Christ reaches every soul. To the Corinthians, as to us, this fragrance is of eternal life. However, to those who reject the call, it is a smell of death (2 Cor. 2:15-16).
- ❖ Focusing on the responsibility this entails, Paul explains that the message must be given sincerely, without seeking any personal gain, but the salvation of the listeners (2 Cor. 2:17).