

2 Corinthians 7:2-16
(Psalm 46:1-11; John 14:1-6)
“Learning and Growing through Trouble”

Introduction

At the heart of this letter is Paul’s reminder that the Christian life is not always happy and successful, and that we should beware of anyone who says that, if we just come to Jesus, we will no longer have to face hardship and trouble. But does that mean that the gospel does not actually change anything, that we are simply at the mercy of whatever may come, left to face live alone with our own limited resources? Does it mean that we must simply try to get by as best we can in the hope that, lousy as life is, the life to come will be better?

In the passage before us this morning, Paul makes it clear that followers of Christ are to face times of trouble quite differently from those who are merely living for the pleasures and success of this present age. We see Paul describing a very logical progression from the initial disorientation that we feel when trouble crashes in on us, on through the process of reestablishing emotional and spiritual equilibrium.

He speaks autobiographically, describing his own growth in a particular situation as the troubles he faced afforded him an opportunity for spiritual growth and healthy perspective that he would not have had if all were going his way. In describing his own maturing view of things, he helps us understand why we are permitted to suffer and what God would teach us in times of trouble.

Body

1. Finding *perspective* in times of trouble (7:4):

Our tendency in times of trouble is to feel abandoned by God, to think that we cannot be effective in endeavor or relationship until troubles cease and calm returns. Times of trouble go against our American ethos of health, success, pleasure, and the quest for personal peace and affluence.

However, Paul saw his troubles as advancing the cause of Christ, as bringing him the humility necessary to depend upon Christ, the weakness necessary to realize God’s power, and the foolishness necessary to ensure that God alone gets the glory for anything good that happens.

Nowhere in Paul’s letters is this clearer than in the latter chapters of this letter, where Paul takes the specific accusations of his opponents and, by ridiculing himself, shows the absurdity of those charges.

2. Finding *comfort* in times of trouble (7:6-7):

It is only in times of trouble that we are able to experience to the full the comfort of God. As John Calvin wrote, “the more we are afflicted, so much the greater is the consolation prepared for us by God.” So, here, Paul speaks of the deep comfort and encouragement that came to him through the people of God, his brothers and sisters in Christ.

The lesson here is the same as that of the opening chapter of the letter: God is the God of all comfort and compassion, and he comforts us through one another, especially through those who have been through the same kinds of things that we are facing (see 1:3-11).

3. Finding *meaning* in times of trouble (7:10):

Not only do we experience the comforting presence of God in times of trouble, but we also begin to understand why God let’s his children go through pain and difficulty. We realize that we have more to learn than endurance, for the godly sorrow that hard times often bring leads to repentance, which leads to salvation, which leads to earnestness and longing for God’s purposes to be accomplished in a painful world.

4. Finding *encouragement* in times of trouble (7:13):

As we discover meaning in suffering, we find encouragement, as well. We are encouraged to see God take what would, apart from his grace, break us down and rob us of hope, and turn it around to build us up and set us on our way stronger and more hopeful than before, for we realize that nothing “in all creation will be able separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

Conclusion

Finding *confidence* in times of trouble (7:16):

And so, Paul ends this passage on a note of joyful confidence: “I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you” (7:16).