

Paul planted the church in Corinth and spent time building up fellow believers there, with whom he developed a strong bond. When he left, his associates reported problems that arose within the church. So Paul wrote a letter addressing these issues, a letter which is now lost. This was followed by another letter which we know as 1 Corinthians. Recall that Paul stressed the importance of the gospel to unite the church with love and common purpose, and how Paul instructed the Corinthians to stop fighting over things that were unimportant. However, this letter did not produce the results that Paul hoped, so Paul sent a third letter, which was also lost, that was quite severe and chastising (sometimes referred to as the “severe letter”). This letter caused the Corinthians to change, perhaps after an initial negative reaction to the tone of the letter wore off. However, because of the harsh nature of the third letter, it was uncertain whether some felt that their relationship with Paul had been severed, which might have led them to follow false teachers. So Paul wrote a fourth letter, which we know as 2 Corinthians, in which he reminded the Corinthians of who he was and tried to create a better relationship with them. Now that many of the Corinthians’ issues have been corrected, Paul uses this letter to celebrate the gospel and the transformation it brings about. 2 Corinthians 8:9 speaks of the riches we have in Christ Jesus. Whenever anyone obtains a large amount of wealth in a short time they are undoubtedly changed by it. The mortgage and bills no longer seem to matter. Likewise, the spiritual riches we receive in Jesus change us for the better. We no longer need to focus on the unimportant things because things have changed for us. Jesus became poor so that we might become rich. The riches of His inheritance should make a difference in our lives.

First, in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Paul talks about how God comforts us so that we might comfort others. He’s talking about comfort here because the situation in Corinth and Paul’s own situation are not very good. Verse 8 tells us Paul was in danger of death. Paul talks about comfort because it has to do with his immediate circumstances. So how does God comfort us? Verse 3 says that God is the Father of compassion, meaning not only that He is the source of all compassion and controls all compassion, but also that He is a compassionate Father (as we also see in Psalm 103:13). We see next that God is the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our

troubles. It is pretty much guaranteed that we will face troubles in this life. Verse 5 says that we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ. The word “abundantly” is the same word used to describe the leftover food after Jesus fed the five thousand (Matthew 14:20). If you are going through a smooth peaceful time, don’t be surprised when trouble comes. It’s only a matter of time. To be fair, Paul is explicitly talking about the suffering in the midst of persecution, which we don’t often experience. But this can easily be extrapolated to all kinds of suffering that result from living in this broken world. Suffering is to be expected, so nobody should say they have more than their fair share for suffering. But just as our suffering overflows, so does our comfort in Jesus (v. 5). The God of all comfort comforts us in all troubles. His comfort matches our troubles. Not matter how severe our trouble is, His comfort will be sufficient for it.

But how does God comfort us? It’s not just a mysterious feeling of comfort God gives us out of the blue. We see in v. 4 that God comforts us so we can comfort others. So, just as God comforts others through us, He comforts us through others as well. Just like God provides for children through their parents, He provides comfort through our brothers and sisters. This is why relationships in the church community are so vital. We must turn to each other with our troubles and comfort each other. This implies that we should have empathy with each other. Shared suffering can bring comfort to us, knowing that we do not suffer alone. As we share in Christ’s suffering, we also participate in God’s work of compassion and comforting, so we may comfort each other in times of trouble. So although we should expect to suffer in this world, let us keep our eyes on the world to come, and share our troubles with each other so that we may share God’s comfort with each other as well.