

# Everlasting Consolation

Isaiah 51:1–12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17 (16–17)

The wonderful weather we enjoyed this last week—the sunshine, blue skies, colorful fall flowers—is a reminder that the world we live in is a beautiful place. God is a bountiful God; truly, he has given us every good and perfect gift!

Yet the world we live in has been marred by sin. As Paul reminds us in the quaint and memorable language of the King James Version, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain,” longing to be “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” at the final day.<sup>1</sup> That day will happen, we can be sure, because God’s promise can never be broken, but in the meantime it is our lot to experience difficulties in this life—troubles, worries, hardship, suffering, illness, heartache, betrayal, loss, death. No human being can escape these. Yet the gospel teaches the Christian to *glory* in tribulations, knowing that our loving heavenly Father is using them to mold us into the image of Christ and teach us lessons that we could never learn otherwise. Our light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus!

Our text for exposition and application this morning is the last two verses of our chapter: “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” As we shall see, this Scripture is (1) a prayer, (2) a blessing, and (3) a promise. First,

## 1. A prayer

Here is a prayer to the triune God. The Father and the Son are specifically mentioned; the Spirit is implied in the word “comfort,” as we shall see. This is a prayer to encourage the hearts of the Thessalonian Christians and establish them in the faith. Note that Paul does *not* pray that God would lift their burdens or judge their enemies; rather he prays that they would be enabled to live out their faith in the rough and tumble of this world. Essentially, it is a prayer for Christian character that enables God’s people to survive and thrive in a world of turmoil, trouble and uncertainty.

Here is a prayer not only for the Thessalonians but for the church throughout all time. Here is a model for the kind of prayer that we ought to offer for each other.

Here at Grace OPC, at the close of our worship services, after the livestream ends, our elders pray for the needs of the congregation. In the ministry of prayer our elders are following the lead of the apostles and living out their calling as shepherds over God’s people. This is a spiritual ministry. God intended that the

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:21–22

officers of the church not only set a good example and give good instruction but also pray for the needs of God's people.

There will always be needs to pray for! For their personal walk with the Lord, for their spiritual growth and strengthening; for their personal commitment to the Lord; for their ability to resist temptation and stand strong in the faith; for strength and power to keep their membership vows, baptismal vows, marriage vows, ordination vows; for their marriages and families; for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, for wives to submit to their own husbands, respect them and be helpers to them in their calling; for heads of families seeking to establish a godly atmosphere in the home, teaching the word of God to their families, endeavoring to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; for blended families; for students studying to show themselves approved unto God; for sons and daughters taking care of their parents in their old age; for God's people endeavoring to live out their calling in the workplace as honest business owners and employees, treating one another with respect; for the church's witness before a watching world; for the Spirit of God to draw the men and women to faith; for the advance of the gospel; for church planting and foreign missions; for world peace; for healing, for strength in weakness, safety in danger, wisdom in challenging situations; for comfort for those who mourn; that the kingdom of Christ would grow, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with gospel officers—all this and much more!

As we are reminded in our *Book of Church Order*, ministers are especially charged to “pray for and with Christ's flock as the mouth of the people before God.” Ruling elders likewise should “pray with and for the people.” Individual Christians should pray as well. James writes: “pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (5:16). We are to pray for our leaders, for those who are over us in the Lord. Paul pleaded, “Brethren, pray for us.”

How do we learn how to pray? Our Shorter Catechism, summarizing the teaching of Scripture, asks, “What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?” Answer: “The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord's prayer.” Every Christian would do well to study the way the various petitions of the Lord's Prayer inform our duty to pray.

Our *Book of Church Order* observes that “it can be fitting at times for the entire congregation to pray vocally in unison. The form of prayer that our Lord Jesus taught his disciples, commonly called ‘the Lord's Prayer,’ is particularly appropriate for this use by the congregation. Great care should be taken, however, to guard against allowing this practice to become a mere formula or ritual.” Wise

words! Every Christian should learn the Lord's Prayer by heart, meditate on its petitions, pray for biblical insight, and intelligently pray the various petitions, asking God for wisdom for the situations we face as individuals, as well as the church as a whole. We are sure to face many sorrows in this life. In this world we shall have tribulation! May our hearts be comforted in the biblical sense, and may we be established in every good word and work, as the apostle prays.

The Greek word for "comfort" is the verbal form of Paraclete, *the one called alongside to help*, a title for the Holy Spirit. The comfort for which Paul prays is the Spirit's comfort. It is impossible for us to live the Christian life in our own strength!

But on resurrection Sunday, as our Lord met with his disciples in the Upper Room, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). This was literally fulfilled seven weeks later on the Day of Pentecost (from the Greek word for *fifty*—fifty days according to the Jewish method of counting, which included the first and fiftieth days in the enumeration). From Christ's exalted state at the right hand of the Father he sent his Spirit upon his church to comfort and empower her to carry out his Great Commission of taking the gospel to the nations. Paul prays, "May God comfort your hearts." The word *comfort* comes from the Middle English *comforten*, meaning *to strengthen spiritually, inspire with courage, exhort, cheer up, encourage, invigorate*, coming ultimately from a Latin word meaning *to strengthen, be strong*—think of the word *fort*, a stronghold.

Do you ever feel inadequate? Do you ever think, *I am so weak, so small, so insignificant; why doesn't God call someone more able, more gifted, for the task?* The reason is because God delights to demonstrate his power through weak vessels. He is great. He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). God delights to use weak vessels that are totally sold out to him, so that it becomes evident to all that what was done in our life was *his* doing.

Our text is a prayer. Secondly, it is

## **2. A blessing**

A blessing is a benefit bestowed by God or Christ. That is certainly the sense here, where the benefits of everlasting consolation, good hope by grace, comfort of heart and establishment in every good word and work are benefits freely bestowed and poured out upon God's believing people by Christ, through his Spirit.

Notice that this blessing is bestowed by "our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father." Here are two members of the Holy Trinity, the Son and the Father, who are said to have loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace. It is significant that the words for "loved" and "given" are singular, not plural. This is akin to Jesus' command to his church to go and make

disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the *name* (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Note well that Jesus did not say, “in the *names*” (plural). To have said such would be teaching falsehood—teaching *tritheism*, the error that there are three gods. The church baptizes in the *name* (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the language of trinitarianism: that there is one God existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is one in essence and three in personhood. In the words of the Athanasian Creed, “we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confounding their persons nor dividing the essence.” In our text this morning we have “our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father”—two persons—a compound subject which ordinarily would take a plural verb, but the verbs are singular: “who *has* [not *have!*] loved us and given us everlasting consolation. There is a comma after “our Lord Jesus Christ Himself,” which might lead one to think that the subject is singular: “our God and Father.” But then why does Paul refer to the Lord Jesus Christ in this connection? What is this reference to the Lord Jesus Christ? Some of the cults would have us believe that Jesus Christ is a mere man, a mere creature. But if that is so—that he is a mere man—why is he closely and inextricably linked with God the Father in loving us and giving us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace? Here is a clear proof of the deity or divinity of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word who is God (John 1:1). Make no mistake; Jesus *is* God! Calvin comments, “When he ascribes to Christ a work altogether Divine, and represents him, in common with the Father, as the Author of the choicest blessings, as we have in this a clear proof of the divinity of Christ, so we are admonished, that *we cannot obtain anything from God unless we seek it in Christ himself.*”

Here we see Christ with the Father given us “everlasting consolation.” The word for consolation is *παράκλησις*, from the same root as *παράκλητος*, Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. Christ, along with the Father, gives us *παράκλησις*, everlasting comfort. He also gives the Paraclete, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

In this world we have sorrow, but in the midst of that sorrow we have comfort, or consolation. We sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. But the comfort we have is not limited to this life only, it is everlasting. Do we want to have *everlasting* comfort? We need to remember that that comfort is to be found in Christ. Worldlings vainly try to find comfort in substances, in entertainment, in relationships, in merrymaking. But the comfort the world provides is temporary; comfort (or *consolation*; they are the same word in Greek) that is *everlasting* (in other words, that will last through eternity future) is found only in Christ.

Are you trying to find comfort or consolation in the things of this earth? They might dazzle you and hold your attention for a time. But they are like addictive

drugs; the longer you take them you begin to need a larger dosage to get the same effect. Keep that up and it will kill you!

What our Lord offers is true, everlasting consolation for the soul—true comfort. It will never run out, it will never become ineffective. What Christ has to offer is the real thing. Do you lack assurance of salvation? Do you feel inadequate, as if you haven't done enough? The answer is not to try harder or do better but to look to Christ alone for your salvation, receive it as a free gift, then show your gratitude by living a life of obedience and good works that are the fruit of a true faith. Only by resting in Christ will you gain everlasting consolation. It is the gift of Christ; that is the only place you can get it. It lasts throughout this life and will never give out, even in eternity future. Amen!

So here we see that our text is a blessing. It is a blessing like Jacob blessing his sons, or like the Aaronic blessing:

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace”—to which the LORD adds, “So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will *bless* them” (Num. 6:24–27).

We see this promise of *consolation* in our Old Testament text this morning, Isaiah 51: “For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will *comfort* all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; *joy* and *gladness* will be found in it, *thanksgiving* and the voice of *melody*. . . . So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with *everlasting joy* on their heads. They shall obtain *joy* and *gladness*; sorrow and sighing shall flee away. I, even I, am He who *comforts* you.”

The comfort that the LORD gives, gives joy and gladness and singing and melody. “He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” If you have this everlasting consolation and comfort, you can't stop singing about it!

Our text is a prayer, it is a blessing. Thirdly, it is

### **3. A promise**

Brothers and sisters, these are not just fine-sounding words! Here is the word of God—holy Scripture. These are the inspired words of him who cannot lie. Here is the authoritative expression of the divine will.

As the apostle John wrote in 1 John 5, “this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”

How do we know that our prayer requests are according to the will of God? When we pray the Scriptures! God's word is truth. He is the God who cannot lie. All his promises are “yea” and “amen.” In our Scripture text this morning we have the will of the living God. Scripture cannot be broken.

Does God say, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work”? Indeed he does! Is it true? Can we stake our eternal destiny on it? Indeed, yes!

O my hearer, if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for your eternal salvation, if you know that you are a sinner. If, by God’s grace, you hate your sin (not just the bitter *consequences* of your sin). If you confess your sin to God and look to Jesus Christ, the only Mediator and Savior, in faith to save you, then you are saved. You love the Lord. You love to sing his praises. You love to tell others about him. You love to live a life of obedience, in conformity with his word. You desire God. You want, more than anything else, to walk in fellowship with him. You can say with John Calvin, “Here’s my heart. I offer it to you, promptly and sincerely.” The fact that God loved you with an everlasting love, and sent his Son to become man, live a perfect life in unbroken fellowship with God, go to the cross bearing the sins of his people, rising again the third day for our justification, ascending up to heaven where he intercedes for his people 24–7, praying that we will not enter into temptation but live a life of victory and holiness before him, promising us everlasting consolation in his holy presence—there can be no better deal anywhere!

Our Lord has given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace. Amen! Here is a prayer, a blessing, a promise.

Yes, we live in a sinful world where we face all kinds of problems and difficulties and challenges. We face a powerful enemy, the Prince of the power of the air, that is at work in the children of disobedience. God has given us his Great Commission to take the gospel to the nations and subdue the earth to his glory. It is a huge task, and none of us is adequate for the task. Yet he calls us to be faithful. How will we ever accomplish it? Only by the power of Christ, who strengthens in every good work to do his will, through the power of the Spirit whom he has poured out upon his church.

How will you live a life of integrity and faithfulness in the calling to which he has called you? How will you glorify him in your various roles—as husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, grandfather, granddaughter; teacher, student, business owner, employee; church member, agent of the state, officer, service member; pastor, elder, deacon?

Church of Jesus Christ, you do not have to do it alone. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, is the one who takes it upon himself to comfort your hearts by his Holy Spirit and to establish you in every good word and work. You do not have to beg him to do this, as you would have to beg an unwilling person to do an unpleasant task. Christ has already done it. And believe

me, he is in it for the long haul. His promises never fail. He wants you to succeed, by his power. He has sent his Spirit into your heart to enable you to will and do according to his good pleasure.

Humble yourself before him. Call upon his name. Pray for mercy and strength. Pray especially for strengthening by his Spirit. Yield yourself to him. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life. Christ is on his throne. He will never leave you nor forsake you. You are not alone. His Spirit is with you. Amen.