

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF CONSOLATION – COMFORT.

"Josés, by the Apostles, was surnamed Barnabas; which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation [comfort]" – Acts 4:36.

COMFORT! Consolation! What rest and refreshment and peace and joy these words imply! That the name, "son of consolation," or comfort, should be given to any one of mature years tells a whole volume in itself respecting the general character of the person. We know little about Barnabas, but if this one sentence of holy writ comprised the sum of our knowledge we could not fail to love and appreciate him.

In one sense of the word the Church is spoken of as a mother, Zion, and all the true people of God are thus represented as her children – sons and daughters. Some of these are sons of comfort and daughters of comfort, while others are sons and daughters of pain, continually causing more or less of distress and discomfort to others and to themselves. We want to see this subject in its true light, in order that we may each act accordingly; – that a larger and an increasing number of the children of Zion shall be sons and daughters of comfort to all with whom they come in contact, and thus in a general way comforters to the Church as a whole. Some may be inclined to query, Does the true Church need comfort? Are not the majority too comfortable already? Do they not rather need to be stirred up, to be reminded of their sins, to be chided and made generally as uncomfortable as possible, to the intent that they may thus be helped onward and upward?

We would not ignore the fact that there are occasions when reproofs and corrections in righteousness are proper, as the Apostle advised. But we have no sympathy at all with the thought so common with some good people; viz., that they should always be feeling

miserable with themselves and making other people miserable, by continually nagging and faultfinding upbraiding and terrorizing. We believe that such well meant but mistaken efforts have done much harm, have driven away from the family circle of Zion many who could not, without hypocrisy, claim that they were the vilest of sinners, nor properly appreciate prayers in which they were represented as saying, "Lord, be merciful unto us, *miserable sinners!*" when they realized divine favor and forgiveness – justification from all things.

Those needing reproof, rebuke, etc., are such as are walking after the flesh and not after the Spirit – in violation of their covenant. Those who should be warned to flee from the wrath to come are such as have never yet fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel, – such as are without God, and have no hope in the world – no relationship to Christ, through faith and obedience. But the true "wheat," the true members of the body of Christ, the consecrated, are, however imperfectly, continually seeking to walk after the Spirit; though they are well aware that because of imperfections of the flesh they do not and cannot walk up to the spirit. These, instead of needing reproofs and rebukes and smitings and upbraidings for their shortcomings, which they admit and deplore and strive against, need sympathy, assistance, comfort.

Few probably have noticed to what extent the Scriptures administer this very "balm of Gilead" to the true children of Zion; but the Scriptures are full of comfort, and there is great need that all who are truly the Lord's people should see to it that they are more and more sons and daughters of comfort in the Church, administering to one another the helpfulness and encouragement and refreshment which the Lord intended. Our Lord spoke of the holy Spirit as the Comforter, and he mentions himself also as a Comforter, saying, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you *another* Comforter." (John 14:16.) To what **[R3434 : page 292]** extent our Lord Jesus was a Comforter we may judge as we look back to the three and a half years

of his ministry, and at its close hear him say to his faithful ones, "I will not leave you comfortless" – orphans, bereaved of a caretaker. And as respects his care over the apostles while with them, we have a suggestion from his prayer to the Father, "Of those whom thou has given me I have lost none save the son of perdition," as the Scriptures foretold. – John 17:12.

It had been foretold of our Lord in advance through the prophets, that he would be a Comforter, as we read, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted;...to *comfort* all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." – Isa. 61:1-3.

All this means that our Lord Jesus was a Comforter in Zion above and beyond all other comforters. He entered into sympathy with the meek and lowly and right-intentioned in all of their weaknesses and trials and difficulties; and this is the hold that the character and words of Jesus have to-day upon our hearts, and also upon the hearts of many who are not his people in the full consecrated sense. It was not by continually chiding the apostles, and accusing them, but because, instead, our Lord sympathized with them, assisted them, and interpreted their heart-intentions liberally, generously, that they became more and more his faithful followers, even unto death. Note the case of the woman taken in sin, and our Lord's failure to make any pharisaical tirade against her. Mark his reproof to those who stood by: "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." Mark how, when they were all thus convicted of imperfection in some particular themselves, our Lord said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more." (John 8:3-11.) Notice his dealing with the Apostle Peter, after he had denied him, cursing and swearing. Many of the Lord's followers, if in his stead, would have felt it their bounden duty to rebuke Peter publicly before all the apostles, and to have required public confession and some sort of

penance; and on every possible occasion afterward to have thrown in his face his weakness and disloyalty. Such have not rightly interpreted and copied the Lord's spirit, and hence are not sons and daughters of consolation in the Church. They are, on the contrary, strife-breeders, vexatious hinderers of the work they desire to forward. They should hear the Master's voice, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." In proportion as we learn of the Lord we become, not mouthpieces for the Law merely, but mouthpieces specially for mercy and love and helpfulness and comfort.

So far as the record shows, our Lord did not once mention to Peter either his profanity or his disloyalty. Peter knew about these without being told; he had already wept over them; a mere word from the Lord in chiding, reproof, might have discouraged him, – perhaps hopelessly. The nearest thing to a reproof in our Lord's conduct and language was the inquiry, "Lovest thou me?" Let all who would be true sons and daughters of consolation in Zion learn this lesson from the great Teacher – not to strive to punish and correct and reprove and rebuke; but to avoid these so far as possible, and to inquire, not so much about the past as about the present – What is the offender's present attitude toward the Lord and toward his flock?

COMFORT AND COMFORTING NEEDFUL.

It was with the full appreciation of the fact that the Church would need comfort rather than chiding and reproof that our Lord said, "If I go not away the Comforter [the holy Spirit] cannot come." The ransom must be paid, must be presented in the "Most Holy," to the heavenly Father, before his blessing could be bestowed. That blessing would yield the comfort of the begetting of the Spirit and the comfort of the exceeding great and precious promises to those who had accepted Jesus, – and to those who would believe on him through their word. True, our Lord spoke of the holy Spirit as reproofing – but not as reproofing the Church; he said, "He shall reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of a coming

judgment." The nearest suggestion to reproof in respect to the holy Spirit's dealing with the Church is that given by the Apostle, when he says, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." And again he says, "Quench not the Spirit." – Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19.

The grand provision made for the comfort of the Lord's people clearly indicates a necessity for such comfort; nor is this necessity difficult to find. The Lord's people are beset on every hand with adverse conditions – the world, the flesh, the adversary – seeking to intimidate or discourage or entrap the new creature, so as to hinder its development in grace, knowledge and love, and ultimately to hinder it from the attainment of the perfection and glory to follow, which God has promised to the faithful only. What we need, in order to make us sons and daughters of consolation in the Church, is a larger measure of love and sympathy in our hearts. In proportion as sympathy and love come in, they will crowd out the spirit of strife and contention and judging and fault-finding; even as they crowded out at first the spirit of the flesh, – anger, malice, hatred, strife, vain-glory.

As a rule (there probably are exceptions to all **[R3435 : page 293]** rules) those who have the spirit of helpfulness, of comfort, of consolation, and who are able to pour this balm into the wounded hearts of others most liberally, are those who themselves have passed through severe trials, difficulties, disciplines, and who have thus been touched with a feeling of the infirmities of our race, and, more than this, have been touched with a feeling of sympathy for the weaknesses and oppositions which assail the "brethren" in their endeavor to walk after the Spirit – not after the flesh. Those who have not "bowels of compassion," who have little of sympathy, little of desire to lend a helping hand to the weak or the stumbling or those who are out of the way, have much yet to learn respecting the real meaning of the word love, in its higher senses – perfect love, love for

the brethren, yea, love that extends to all mankind, even to enemies, as it has opportunity, but "especially to the household of faith."

The holy Spirit comforts the Church in various ways. (1) It comforts us by enabling us to come into such unity with the Truth and with the Lord that we can to a considerable extent see matters not only from the divine standpoint but also can appreciate and feel from the same standpoint. For although the spirit of the Truth is in the Word of Truth, there is, nevertheless, a necessity that the eyes of our understanding should be opened, that we may be enabled to comprehend the Word of Truth; and this double comfort is ours through the possession of the holy Spirit, – in proportion as it abounds and is shed abroad in our hearts. It, of course, abounds and is shed abroad in the Word, but this is not sufficient. It must also be in our hearts a living power. Thus we read of the early Church, "Walking in the fear [reverence] of the Lord, and in the comfort of the holy Spirit." – Acts 9:31.

(2) It comforts us through the Scriptures, and through the promises of God, the Truth – for is it not the spirit of the Truth? The Word of God, as the channel of the Truth, is to comfort us in proportion as the holy Spirit guides us into an understanding of it; as we read, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning [instruction], that we through patience and *comfort of the Scriptures* might have hope." – Rom. 15:4.

(3) The Church, the brethren, in proportion as they become imbued with the holy Spirit and with the knowledge of the Truth, which it brings to their appreciation and comprehension, thereby become representatives of the holy Spirit in the Church – comforters. This is the thought of the Apostle when he says, "Now the God of patience and consolation [comfort] grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus." – Rom. 15:5.

COMFORTED AND TAUGHT TO BE COMFORTERS.

Reversing the foregoing order, and considering the way in which the brethren are to comfort the Church, we note that it is as the channels of the holy Spirit, and as the mouthpieces of the Word of God. No one is competent to be a comforter unless he already has received comfort from God. So to speak, the Lord's people begin receiving their comfort from the time they accept the assurances of God's Word respecting his love and mercy, as exhibited in Christ Jesus, in that he died for our sins. In their appropriation of this divine favor to themselves by faith, they had their first taste of comfort – peace, joy, blessing. As they then proceeded and learned the way of the Lord more perfectly, the door of access into a still further grace was opened unto them – the grace of invitation to joint-heirship with Christ in the Kingdom, and its glorious work of comforting and uplifting mankind in general. (Rom. 5:2.) And as this door of favor was entered, additional comfort, additional joy, additional peace and blessing were added and understood and appreciated. And then, as the favored ones progressed under the ministries of the Truth, supplied by the holy Spirit, and became more and more able to rightly divide the Word of Truth, and to appreciate the different features of it, in the same proportion their faith grew stronger, and their comforts and joys multiplied through increasing and deepening knowledge of the Lord and of his plan.

Furthermore, as they behold in the glass of the divine Word the glory of the Lord, the reflected light of his glorious character illuminating their hearts and enabling them to comprehend with all saints the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the divine love, it brings still increasing confidence and comfort. And every one of these steps of progress, rightly received, and every additional element of character developed prepares the favored one for the exercise of his privilege of being a *comforter* to others. True, it was his duty and privilege to begin to comfort others as soon as he received the first elements of comfort himself, and to continue

distributing the comforts as they came to him. Indeed, we know both from experience and from the Word that unless he thus made use of the favors and blessings, and showed his appreciation of the grace of God by shining it forth upon others, his light thus being obscured would grow dim and eventually be extinguished. But the point we wish to impress is that ability to be a comforter depends upon growth in grace and knowledge, for none but those who themselves are comforted can dispense this grace to others.

Notice the Apostle's exhortation on this subject, and along the lines just marked out. In his second [R3435 : page 294] letter to the Corinthians (1:3-7), he says, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all *comfort*; who *comforteth* us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to *comfort* them which are in any trouble by the *comfort* wherewith we ourselves are *comforted* of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation [*comfort*] also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted it is for your consolation [*comfort*] and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be *comforted*, it is for your consolation [*comfort*] and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings so shall ye be also of the consolation [*comfort*]."

Ten times in these verses does the Apostle use this word "comfort." He evidently had a keen appreciation of how much the Church needed such consolation, and how much the God of all comfort wished to have his faithful ones comforted, and how even the strongest in the Church, the apostles, needed comfort. What better evidence could we ask than that the spirit of comfort and of consolation, which the heavenly Father manifested, which the Lord Jesus manifested, which the apostles manifested and which all the faithful in Christ Jesus are called upon to exercise, is indeed the very Spirit of the Truth, the holy Spirit! Consequently, those who are

making greatest progress in this direction, as comforters in Zion, are growing most in grace; and so we may be sure will be best able to grow also in knowledge, and to be helpful to the Church in every sense of the word, and to be used of the Lord as mouthpieces in the ministry of his Truth.

A little further along in the same epistle (7:4-13), the Apostle uses this word, "comfort," seven times, saying, "I am filled with *comfort*; I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation. For when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless, God that *comforteth* those that are cast down, *comforted* us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation [*comfort*] wherewith he was *comforted* of you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoice the more.... Therefore, we were *comforted* in your *comfort*." Here we see illustrated, in the Apostle's language, the mutual helpfulness of the Church in this matter of comfort. Titus had a part in it, Paul had a part in it, the Church at Corinth had a part in it – every member possessing the holy Spirit and exercised by it had a share; and the Apostle declares that all this comfort was of God. And he expresses it as though this were God's general disposition, in every such circumstance of his people, when he speaks of him as "the God of all comfort," and "the God that comforteth them that are cast down." We may safely understand, therefore, that wherever we find one of the Lord's followers, however great his weakness, however much cast down, we have in his case presented to us an opportunity of serving the Lord, of being channels of his mercy, and carrying to the downcast one something of comfort and consolation and helpfulness.

Speaking respecting his own course, the Apostle, in his first letter to the Thessalonians (2:11), gives us a little insight to his methods, and shows us that he neither domineered nor tyrannized over the Church, nor continually harassed, threatened and upbraided

them. On the contrary, he says, "Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a [proper] father doth his children." This familiar spirit in the apostles, which enabled them as fathers and as brethren in the Church to comfort and assist, should be a guide now to all who would be servants of the Lord and helpful children of comfort – sons of consolation.

It is those who enter into this real Spirit of God, the real spirit of his Truth, who are thereby proportionately prepared to comprehend the meaning of the prophecies and revelations of the Lord which are hidden to the worldly wise, – hidden to all who have not the spirit of Christ, the spirit of consolation, of helpfulness, of sympathy, of love. Possibly this is one reason why so few of the professed expounders of the Word of God meet with any success in interpreting it; probably this is one reason why so many are in darkness. They have not received the spirit of comfort and love, and therefore cannot appreciate the loving, gracious plan which the Word of God upholds. It probably was not by accident that the Apostle, when stating that we are to "grow in grace and in knowledge," put the grace first.

We have seen what it is to have the comfort of the brethren through the holy Spirit; let us inquire now what it is to have "the comfort of the Scriptures," which we are enabled to comprehend by the possession of the holy spirit of comfort. We note again the prophetic statement of Isaiah (61:1), and that while **[R3436 : page 294]** this applied primarily to our Lord, the Head of the body, it must, therefore, necessarily also apply to every member of the body of the anointed. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon all the members, coming down to them from the Head, upon whom the holy oil of anointing was poured; and it must be true of every member as of the Head, – "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the good tidings; to bind up the broken-hearted [not to break hearts, but to heal the broken ones]; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty

for [R3436 : page 295] ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

As it is not our commission to break men's hearts, even the worldly, hard-hearted ones, but to leave them for the Lord to break through various disciplines and judgments; so likewise it is not appointed unto us to comfort those who do not mourn; nor is it our commission to specially cause mourning that we may comfort it. Our commission is to seek out the meek and the mourning ones, who have appreciated their own shortcomings and weaknesses, and who are looking for refuge and deliverance. It is part of our commission to point them to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, to point them to the beauty of the resurrection for the ashes of death, and the glories which the Lord has promised by and by to take the place of the spirit of heaviness and disappointment and sorrow and trouble of this present time. It is our commission to tell such that "Joy cometh in the morning," and to assist them to arise and at once put on the garments of praise, and begin to walk in newness of life, with "a new song in their mouths – even the loving kindness of our God."

It is the wrong thought which some good people get, that the Lord's children in this present time should be gloomy, morose, sad, – mourners for sin. Whoever has heard the Gospel message has cause for rejoicing. When the Lord said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," he said it in the Jewish age – under the Law which condemned all imperfection, on account of which, therefore, all who were hungering and thirsting after righteousness and seeking to walk uprightly were necessarily in mourning for their sins, because of their inability to come up to the grand standard of the perfect law of God, and hence their inability to gain everlasting life under the conditions of that Law. The Apostle represented not only himself but all sincere Israelites, groaning under the Law, when he cried out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this dead body?" (Rom. 7:24.) He was mourning, and the Lord appointed that all the mourners in Zion should be comforted –

comforted with the assurance that, while they were sinners and imperfect and could never justify themselves before God under the Law, nevertheless, God himself had found a ransom, had redeemed his people. It is in view of this comforting assurance of the Gospel that the Apostle, after representing himself as the Jew, under the Law, groaning and travailing, and crying for deliverance, in the next breath represents himself as the Christian who has found the deliverance, and exclaims, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Shall the victors mourn, even though the victory be not entirely their own, but primarily bought with the precious blood of Christ? Nay, verily. We neither sorrow nor mourn, as do others, because of the good hope which is as an anchor to our souls, sure and steadfast – the hope of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord's people, having embraced the Truth, find themselves beset on every hand with oppositions from the Evil One and his servants; and were it not that they have the comfort and consolation of the Scriptures, and the joy and peace which the world can neither give nor take away, theirs would be a sad lot indeed. But under conditions, as the Lord has arranged them, it is their privilege, even while suffering the loss of earthly things for righteousness' sake, to rejoice in tribulation, and in everything give thanks.

What is the secret of this rejoicing in tribulation? Whence comes so great a comfort as this? We answer, it comes through the comfort of the Scriptures, made luminous by the holy Spirit. For instance, take the inspired prophecy respecting Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are not, – because they are dead. (Jer. 31:15-17.) The Lord's message of comfort to Rachel, and thus to all who have suffered loss through the great penalty of death, is, "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy little ones shall come again from the land of the enemy." Does this speak peace and comfort to the wounded heart of the parent, thinking of his child that is dead? Yes, verily; it brings a

consolation, a comfort, with which no error can compare. There are, indeed, various delusive fancies which picture themselves before the minds of the bereaved, in which they fain would trust and hope; but they are weak, they are intangible, they have no foundation in the Word of God. Hence they cannot give real rest or peace in such a time of trial.

But when we hear the voice of the Lord assuring us of the resurrection, assuring us that the grave is indeed the land of the enemy, assuring us, – not that our little ones are more alive than ever, but that, having gone to the land of the enemy, they are secure, because Jesus has prevailed, has bought the world with his own precious blood. Jesus has "the keys of death and of the grave," as he declares (Rev. 1:18), and will shortly open and bring forth all the captive prisoners of death from the prison-house, the tomb. There is a comfort, a consolation, in this message, which can be applied with profit to every heart bleeding under such wounds.

All "the comfort of the Scriptures" is along this line. They show us that the present reign of sin and death is not to be an everlasting one; that a new dispensation is to be ushered in as the result of the great Redeemer's sacrifice, and that in this new dispensation a blessing shall come to all the families of the earth, and a special blessing to the Church. Favored now **[R3436 : page 296]** with a knowledge of the Lord, the faithful of this time shall be made heirs with Jesus in the great Kingdom work of blessing the world. Unquestionably this is a comforting assurance, not only for those who are striving to attain to the great prize of our high calling, but also for them in respect to those – their friends and neighbors – who shall be lifted up and blessed under that Millennial Kingdom.

It is of this deliverance that the Apostle speaks, saying, that the Lord's people should not sorrow as others who have no hope, because if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, let us believe also the record of the Scriptures, that his death was a sacrifice on our behalf,

and on behalf of the sins of the whole world, – so that them which sleep in Jesus will God bring from the dead by and through him. (I Thess. 4:13,14.) What a blessed, *comforting* thought it is that the whole world of mankind, which went down into death in Adam, has been bought, so that the death penalty shall be repealed, and thus their death be turned into a sleep, from which all shall be awakened in the Millennial morning, to have an opportunity to learn of the goodness of God, and, if they will, to accept of his favor unto eternal life, by obedience.

Finally, we notice that the Apostle implies, in some of his statements, that the comfort and peace of the Church are dependent largely upon unity of the Spirit of the Lord in the various members: and that we from experience should note that this is the case. He says, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (2 Cor. 13:11.) And again (Phil. 2:1,2), "If there be any consolation [comfort] in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." What exhortations these are to unity, peace, brotherly kindness! How they suggest to us patience, forbearance, gentleness, helpfulness and *comfort* one toward another in the Church; that thus the Spirit of the Lord may abound in all, that each may make the greatest possible progress in the right way. Dear brethren and sisters, let us more and more be worthy of the name Barnabas – Comforter of the brethren. Let us have the holy Spirit abounding in us more and more, for this is the Lord's good pleasure; that with it dwelling in us richly we may be all sons and daughters of comfort in Zion, representatives of our Father, and channels of the holy Spirit, as well as of the Truth.

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