



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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Seventeenth Sermon on 2 Thessalonians Chapter Two

By Thomas Manton

Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work. — 2 Thes. 2:17.

WE come now, thirdly, to the prayer itself. He asketh two benefits:—

1. Comfort.
2. Establishment.

First, Comfort: ‘Comfort your hearts.’ But why doth the apostle pray for that which they had already? He had told them, in the former verse, that God had given them everlasting consolation, and now he prayeth that God would comfort them. The answer given by some is, that he prayeth that God would give them an increase of comfort; by others, that God would give them the continuance of it. Rather, by everlasting consolation is meant the solid matter of comfort; by his prayer, now the effectual application of it; for though sufficient matter of comfort be provided for us, yet God must powerfully apply it. The gospel is a sovereign plaster, yet God’s hand must make it stick. Observe here:—

Doct. That all true and solid and heart-comfort is of God. He is called ‘the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort,’ 2 Cor. 1:3; and again, ‘The God of patience and consolation,’ Rom. 15:5. His Spirit taketh an office upon him to accomplish this effect in us, therefore called the Comforter.

1. I shall inquire what comfort is.
2. Show why it is of God.
3. What advantage we have thereby.

I. What comfort is. Three things are to be explained:—

1. Comfort.
2. Comforting.
3. In what sense it is of God.

I. 1. What comfort is. We call two things by that name:—

- [1.] Our natural refreshment.
- [2.] Our support in troubles.

[1.] Our natural refreshment, or the benefit that we have by the creatures for the support of nature. We cannot enjoy our temporal mercies with any delight and pleasure without God's leave and blessing; as to eat and drink with comfort, that the soul may enjoy good by its labour. In one place it is said, it is 'by the hand of God,' Eccles. 2:24. In another place it is said to be 'the gift of God,' Eccles. 3:13. It is by his power and his grace that the comfort of the creature is not in man's hands but God's; nor can the creature yield to us any comfort without his gift or grant. And because of our forfeiture by sin, we have neither these mercies from ourselves, nor the use; nor the natural benefit from the bare creature, which is health, strength, and cheerfulness. All goodness resideth chiefly in God, and it is to be found in the creatures only by participation, and that at his pleasure: Acts 14:17, 'He gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;' that is, for the comfortable use of food, we must still look to the giver. But the apostle here doth not speak of the comfort of the creatures, but the comfort of the scriptures; not the supply of the body, but the support of the soul.

[2.] Comfort is taken for support in troubles. The Thessalonians were now under great persecutions. Comfort is a strengthening of the mind when it is in danger to be weakened by fears and sorrows, or the strength and stay of the heart in trouble: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in my afflictions, thy word hath quickened me;' and 2 Cor. 1:4, '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 are comforted of God.' As cordials are for a fainting time, so are comforts for a time of afflictions. Indeed spiritual comfort is never out of season; because we are now in the house of our pilgrimage, and our chief good is at a distance from us; and because of the labours and difficulties of the spiritual life: therefore it is said, Acts 9:31, 'When the churches had rest, they walked in the fear of God, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost.'

But the great need of comfort is in our afflictions, therefore here I shall show three things:—

(1.) That God can give his people comfort in the greatest tribulation: his favour is enough to support them against the frowns of all the world: Isa. 51:12, ‘I, even I, am he that comforteth thee. Who art thou that thou shouldest be afraid of man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be made as the grass?’ As long as we have the almighty and immortal God to stand by us, and the promise of eternal life, it will counterbalance all our trouble: Rom. 5:2, 3, ‘We rejoice in hope of the glory of God: and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also;’ 2 Cor. 4:17, ‘This light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.’ There is everlasting joy against a heaviness for a season, and everlasting ease and rest against a little present pain; there is enough to outweigh all that we can suffer for and from God. So the pardon of sin: Isa. 40:1, 2, ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith my God.’ Why? ‘Because her iniquity is pardoned.’ Mat. 9:2, ‘Be of good cheer; thy sin is forgiven thee.’ Here is sound comfort, the sting of all our troubles is taken away. Well, then, this the people of God have to support them in all their tribulation. They can set God against the creature, heaven against earth, pardon of sins against all the bitterness they meet with in the world.

(2.) That there is a special allowance of comfort for God’s children in their afflictions. The Lord is more tender of his people then, when they want comfort, than at another time; they have a more plentiful measure of the supporting operations of his Spirit then: as 1 Peter 4:14, ‘If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.’ As the mother keepeth most with the sick child, so God looketh to the afflicted. This is the difference between God and the world: the world ever runneth most after those that are prosperous, and flourish and rejoice, as rivers into the sea, where there is water enough; but forsaketh those that are in poverty, disgrace, and want; but God is most mindful of his afflicted people, visiteth them most, vouchsafeth most of his comfortable presence to those that holily and meekly bear the afflictions he layeth upon them: ‘He comforteth us in all our tribulations,’ 2 Cor. 1:4. The soul is then more capable of spiritual comforts, because their taste is more purged and refined from the dregs of sense, and grace is more lively and exercised, now; the more

grace, the more comfort. And prayers are more frequent; and prayers are seldom in vain.

(3.) That our comforts carry proportion with our sorrows: 2 Cor. 1:5, 'As our afflictions abound, so do our consolations.' This cometh from the wisdom of God, that the evil may not be greater than our support; and from the faithfulness of God, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear,' 1 Cor. 10:13. And therefore, if he bring on heavy troubles, he puts a suitable measure of comfort and cheerfulness into our hearts. This is comfort.

2. What it is to have our hearts comforted. It showeth that the heart is the proper seat of spiritual comfort: Ps. 4:7, 'Thou hast put gladness into my heart.' God's comfort is like a soaking shower, that goes to the root, and refresheth the plants of the earth more than a morning dew, that wets only the surface. Other comforts tickle the senses and refresh the outward man, but this penetrateth to the very heart. Christ prayeth, John 17:13, 'That they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.' Christ's comforts are not reported to the ear only, but felt in the heart. The joy of the world maketh a great noise, but in the midst of it the heart is sorrowful. But God feasts his children with hidden manna; they have meat and drink which the world knoweth not of. In their outward man they are exposed to great difficulties, but their hearts are filled with 'joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' The joy of the carnal in outward things is foreign; and as much as their senses are pleased, their hearts are full of tormenting fears and secret disguests. They may put a good face upon it, but dig the most jovial of them to the bottom, they have their inward stings and secret horrors of conscience. But in comforting his children God chiefly deals with the heart: Rom. 5:5, 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us;' and 2 Cor. 1:22, 'He hath given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.' In establishing this comfort, God doth immediately work upon the soul. He useth means indeed; as the word: Rom. 15:4, 'That you through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.' There we have the grounds of comfort set forth—Christ's redemption, the promises of the gospel, both of pardon and life, and the ordinances, as the sacraments; as the eunuch after his baptism Acts 8:39, 'He went away rejoicing.' So in the Lord's Supper, we come to eat of Christ's peace-offerings that we may rejoice in God Ps. 22:26, 'The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that

seek him: your heart shall live for ever.’ But his Spirit worketh immediately upon the soul; either—(1.) By opening the understanding standing to see the grounds and reasons of comfort: Rom. 15:13, ‘Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost;’ or (2.) By raising the heart to the lively act of joy: Acts 13:52, ‘The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost’ Certainly God comforteth the heart both ways by seeing the grounds as he worketh faith. Man is a reasonable creature, and it is not imaginable that the Holy Ghost should comfort us we know not why: he revealeth indeed supernatural grounds of comfort; but if they be not evident to reason, they are evident to faith. But then the very joy is executed by the efficacy of his impression. But of that more anon.

3. In what sense comfort may be said to be of God? I answer—Three ways:—

[1.] When it is allowed by him.

[2.] When the matter is provided by him.

[3.] When it is wrought by him.

[1.] When it is allowed by him, and warranted by him. Every man affects comfort and delight of mind; for otherwise they could never be pleased in that condition they are in, nor satisfy themselves. It would much undeceive the carnal world, and make them see the folly of their unreasonable joy and quiet, if they would put conscience to the question, Is our joy from God or no? that is, Doth God allow it me? Certainly God doth allow us to rejoice in our outward portion: Eccles. 5:18, ‘It is good and comely for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labours that he taketh under the sun, all the days of his life which God giveth him, for it is his portion,’ but so that his favour may be the matter of our chief joy, for otherwise it is exceeding folly and gross carnality to rejoice in the creature apart from God. And in the midst of the greatest soul-dangers, you must first inquire, Are all things right between God and me? It is a mighty contempt of God, yea, brutish atheism, to sit down contented with anything on this side God, Luke 12:19, and to say, ‘Soul, take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years.’ To sing lullabies to our souls when God is angry for sin, this comfort is not allowed by God: ‘There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,’ Isa. 57:21. It is spiritual madness ‘to dance about the brink of hell.

[2.] When the matter is provided by him. God in the new covenant hath propounded excellent grounds of comfort: John 14:1, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.' The two great general grounds of support against heart-trouble are God's merciful nature and Christ's mediation; more particularly in the new covenant, the promises of pardon and life,—of pardon of sin: Rom. 5:1-3, 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' &c.; and of life eternal: I Thes. 4:18, 'And so shall we ever be with the Lord; wherefore comfort one another with these words.' It is good to see what comforts we live upon and propound to ourselves and others, more expressly as to afflictions, God's particular providence, that nothing falleth cut without God's appointment: 1 Thes. 3:3, 'That no man should be moved with these afflictions, for yourselves know that we were appointed thereunto.' It is not chance or a natural accident, but that which God hath appointed. If any Shimei rail, the Lord hath bid him curse. If any evil come to us, is it without God's fatherly care over his people, who ordereth all things for their profit? Heb. 12:10, 'They verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' And his unchangeable love, which doth not vary and alter with our condition: Heb. 12:6, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' He is our God still, though he seemeth to deal hardly with us. We learn of Christ on the very cross to cry, 'My God,' Mat. 27:46; and if we cannot find enough in him when the creatures and our natural comforts fail, it is meet we should lose them: Hab. 3:18, 'Though the fig-tree should not blossom, &c., yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' This is the sum of God's comforts; and when these things are suggested to us, God comforteth our hearts.

[3] When by these means God worketh comfort in us. Joy is often called 'the comfort of the Spirit,' and 'joy in the Holy Ghost,' Rom. 14:17. Now all the Spirit's works are singular, and do much exceed the natural work of man's heart. The groans which he stirreth up in prayer are 'unutterable,' Rom. 8:26; his joys 'unspeakable and glorious,' 1 Peter 1:8. The heathens counted that fire more fit and pure for their altars which was enkindled by a sunbeam rather than a coal taken from a common hearth. So this comfort which is raised in us by the Holy Ghost is more rich and glorious and effective than that which is the fruit of our bare reason, or the mere working of our human spirit, even in the common grounds of Christian comfort; or as elementary fire differeth from culinary and kitchen fire, and is much more pure, so doth this joy, which is immediately wrought in us by the Spirit, from all joy that we can work by ourselves, out of the scriptural grounds of comfort. Carnal men have their joy at the

second or third hand, as God blesseth the order and influence of inferior causes; it comes to them from creature to creature, so as they discern not the work of God in it; yea, the joy of common Christians in the proper grounds of comfort is not so strong as that which is raised in us by the immediate impression of the comforting Spirit.

II. Why this is of God.

1. Because God challengeth this as his own right to comfort the heart of man; and therefore, whatever the means of the comfort be, God will be owned as the spring and fountain of it. He keepeth this as his great bridle upon the world, to govern the hearts of men: Job 34:29, 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only.' Our peace and trouble is in God's hands, and at his disposing. It is true he exerciseth his sovereignty according to law, and in his internal government according to the law of grace, penally withdrawing his comforting Spirit, and leaving us to our doubts, and troubles, and fears; by the rewarding our obedience and faithfulness with the manifest tokens of his love, as the matter shall require. It is enough for the point in hand that God alone doth powerfully dispense peace or trouble. And when he will give comfort, none can make his gift void; for it is at his command; and in both, a nation is all one with a particular person as to any ability to resist God.

2. Though grounds of comfort be never so clear, yet if God concur not, we find not the effect; therefore it is his Spirit that can only comfort the heart. To have God's warrant for our comfort is much, but to have his impression is more; both must concur, or the soul will not be comforted. It falleth out many ways, sometimes cut of ignorance. When a well of comfort was near, poor Hagar saw it not, and was almost famished with thirst, until 'God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water,' Gen. 21:19. We know not the grounds of our comfort. Sometimes cut of passion; grief is obstinate, and will admit no remedy: as 'Rachel would not be comforted,' Jer. 31:15. They are so peevishly addicted to their worldly comforts, that if they be crossed in them, they will not admit of God's comforts, though they are evident, clear, and pertinent. Sometimes cut of forgetfulness: Heb. 12:5, 'Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children.' And oblivion is an ignorance for the present. Had they remembered, they would not have fainted and waxed weary. It is a great work of the Spirit to bring to remembrance. Sometimes questioning their interest in comfort; besides that, there are general comforts, when interest is not clear. Now the Spirit, that sheweth us the things given us of God, doth also reveal and evidence our right to them. What is

wrought in our hearts—that is to say, by quickening us to exercise grace,—he evidenceth the truth of grace; and in our afflictions by patience maketh out our comfort: Rom. 5:3-5, ‘We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.’ From the whole, there can be no true solid comfort but what God bestoweth; his favour, and our interest in his favour, is manifested to us by his Spirit.

III. What advantages we have by this, that all solid comfort is of God.

1. It assureth us of God’s readiness to comfort poor afflicted creatures that humbly submit to him. He that is the God of all comfort is also the Father of mercies; his mercy and compassion inclineth him to comfort us. God hath his name from this effect—*Nomina sunt a notioribus* (Things are named according to that for which they are well—known)—‘God that comforteth those that are cast down,’ 2 Cor. 7:6. He is very tender of all afflicted creatures, much more of his people.

2. God’s comforts come with more authority, and silence all our doubts and fears: Ps. 94:19, ‘In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.’ We have many intricate, perplexing thoughts, out of which we cannot disentangle ourselves; no comforts come with such authority and power as God’s comforts. In the comfort we have it is good to consider whence it cometh: Is it God’s comfort, or a fancy of our own? If it be made up by our own fancy, it will be like a spider’s web, that is weaved out of its own bowels, but is gone and swept away with the least turn of a broom; but God’s comforts are more durable: they flow from the true fountain of comfort, upon whose frowns or smiles our happiness and misery dependeth. There is little warmth in a fire of our own kindling. God’s comforts are built on his covenant, and have a commanding force and over-powering efficacy on the soul. God in his word speaketh by sovereign authority; in our hearts he worketh by powerful efficacy. The authority of his word we own when we speak to others or to ourselves, when we know trouble but in supposition or imagination. The efficacy of his grace we feel when trouble comes actually upon us; many that strengthen others, when it cometh upon them faint themselves: Job 4:4,5, ‘Thy words have upholden him that is falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.’ Which showeth that not only the matter of comfort, but the effectual blessing cometh from God, or comforting of souls is his work.

3. That God’s comforts are full and strong. For he worketh like himself, and therefore can and will support his people in the greatest *difficulties*. It is sometimes

represented as full: Acts 13:52, 'The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost;' and, 'I am filled with comfort, and am exceeding joyful in all our tribulations,' 2 Cor. 7:4: *uperperisseuomai th cara*. And our Lord Jesus, when he took care for our comfort, took care for our full comfort: John 15:11, 'These things have I spoken, that my joy may remain in you, and your joy might be full.' Thus we see the joy of believers is a full joy, that no other joy needeth to be added to it; it is a full joy to bear us out under all discouragements. For what is wanting to them who have God for their portion, and the promised glory for their inheritance, and God's providence engaged for their protection, safety, and comfort, while they are here by the way? And it is strong as well as full: Heb. 6:18, 'That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible possible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation: Other comforts are weak and of little force; they are not affliction-proof, much less are they death-proof, and judgment-proof; they cannot stand before a few serious, sober thoughts of the world to come. The comforts of the world cannot stay and revive the heart; for every blast of a temptation scattereth them.

Use 1. To reprove Christians for their over-much dejection and fainting in troubles. Why are we so much cast down? Is there no balm in Gilead, nor comfort in God? Why hath God taken the name upon him of being the God of all comfort, and put this office upon his Spirit to be the comforter? Hath he not made sufficient provision in the new covenant? Is there any evil which the promise of eternal life cannot countervail? Is God backward to give you comfort? Why, then, did he send Christ, write scriptures, appoint a ministry and ordinances, seek to prepare you for it by the seal and earnest of his Spirit, and invite you so earnestly to trust in him, to cast all your care upon him, and so often forbid your fear and sorrow?

Use 2. If all comfort be of God, let us go to God for it. But then take these three directions:—

1. See you be qualified for it. Comfort follows holiness, as heat doth fire: the Spirit is first a sanctifier and then a comforter; and according to God's promise, is more necessarily a sanctifier than a comforter: Eph. 1:13, 14, 'In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.' Comfort is our happiness; but we are made holy before happy. Hereafter we enter into our master's joy, we have a taste of it in the world. But who have this taste but the sanctified and self-denying Christians? The work of

sanctification is carried on more certainly, but his comforting work is many times obscure and interrupted. Do your work thoroughly and faithfully, and you may refer yourselves to God for comfort.

2. Expect not a singular way of comfort besides the word. It was Eliphaz's charge upon Job, chap. 15:11, 'Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?' The charge is, that he undervalued the common consolation of God, and looked for some secret way peculiar to himself of getting comfort, besides humbling of himself, and turning unto God. No; God hath sufficiently provided for the comfort of his people, and we must not expect singular manifestations of his love, and special signs and tokens, beyond the common allowance given to the whole family. It is a thousand to one but it is some false consolation and dream of comfort which they affect and cry up, beyond or besides the usual comforts of his word.

3. Do not compare lower discoveries of God with that great revelation he hath made of his mind in the word, for the comfort of his people; for this argueth great unthankfulness, and a secret desire to set up man's comfort against those which are unquestionably of the Lord. Sure it is, that whatever good is in nature, is from God; but it is mingled with so many weaknesses, that what is of God can scarce be seen in it. I speak of those that cry up heathen philosophy, to the disparagement of the word of God, as if it were a better institution to quiet the mind, and fortify it against all troubles, than Christianity. But alas! they neither know the true ground of misery, which is sin, nor the true ground of comfort, which is Christ, And that which mere man offereth can neither come with such authority and blessing as what cometh immediately from God. This is a moonlight that rotteth things before it ripeneth them. In short, philosophers were never acquainted with Christ, the foundation of comfort; nor the Spirit, the efficient cause of comfort; nor the promise of pardon and life, which is the matter of comfort; nor faith, which is the light by which we know things that depend upon divine revelation, and so the proper instrument of comfort. This I thought good to say, because comfort and rest for souls is one of the great benefits of our religion: Jer. 6:16, 'Stand in the way and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein; and ye shall find rest for your souls;' Mat. 6:28, 29, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Use 3. Seek it in the use of means and ordinances which God hath appointed for the raising of comfort in us, as the word, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. In solemn duties God reneweth the pledges of his love to us, exciteth grace, and by grace comfort. It must needs be so, because then the grounds of comfort are anew laid in the view of conscience; graces are in their lively exercise, and God is not wanting to his own institution. Take all these three together, and the reverent use of the Lord's Supper must needs increase our comfort. The ground of comfort is reconciliation with God by Christ, Rom. 5:11, 'We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement' And here we raise up our faith and love: Cant. 1:4, 'The King hath brought me into his chamber. We will be glad and rejoice in thee; we will remember thy love more than wine. The upright love thee.' God's ordinances are not empty; there is some participation: 1 Cor. 10:16, 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?'

Use 4. Consider the ends why God giveth us comfort. It is to fortify us against the enemies of our salvation, so far as they are vexing, and troubling, and molesting us in the way to heaven. The Spirit hath two great offices—to be a sanctifier and comforter; and both serve all the needs of Christians. When we are enticed to sin, he helps us as a sanctifier; when we are discouraged in God's service, he helps us a comforter. And therefore Christians are to consider their condition, and what their present state requireth; for God dispenseth his grace according to the assaults made, upon them by the enemies of their salvation. As for instance, our enemies are the devil the world, and the flesh. These we renounced in baptism; and in the progress of Christianity, these are those with whom we conflict and must overcome. As for instance, the devil is a tempting devil, who seeketh to draw away the saints from God, and, by the love of the flesh, to weaken our love and obedience to our proper and our rightful Lord. Now what are we to do in this case? To beg comfort and peace, that we may not be troubled, though we yield unto his temptations? Alas! this were to turn the grace of God into wantonness. No; we are to be 'sober and watchful,' 1 Peter 5:8—to use all the rules of sobriety and vigilancy, that our worldly comforts may not be a snare to us (sobriety is a holy moderation in the use of all earthly things: vigilancy is a holy diligence and seriousness in the use of means); and also add to both the

help of the sanctifying Spirit, that we may keep up our love to God, and be faithful in our obedience to him. But the devil is not only a tempting devil, but a vexing and disquieting devil, who ‘accuseth us before God day and night,’ Rev. 12:10, raiseth in us many troublesome fears to make our service uncomfortable, and tire us and clog us. What is our duty then? To beg the help of the Comforter, not only to show love to God, but that we may have some persuasion of his love to us, and quench his fiery darts, that we may go on cheerfully in our work, because ‘the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,’ Rom. 16:20. So for the world. The world is a tempting world, drawing our affections from God and heaven to present things; and when it smileth on us, encroaches upon our hearts more and more: 2 Tim. 4:10, ‘Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.’ Now what is our business then? To beg comfort and assurance of God’s love? No; that would be our bane; there is work for the Sanctifier rather than the Comforter, that the worldly spirit may be subdued in us; there is need of mortification rather than assurance, that we may be ‘crucified to the world,’ Gal. 6:14. But sometimes the world is a persecuting world, and reproacheth and troubleth us with all manner of vexations; then there is work for the Comforter, to seal up to our souls the love of God, our interest in Christ: John 16:33, ‘These things have I spoken to you, that in me ye might have peace; in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world;’ and to become to our souls the earnest of eternal glory. Comfort is for tribulation; at other times we are glutted with it, but then it is our great support. When all things fail, we feel the great necessity of the joys of faith. It is good to time well our duties. David saith, Ps. 56:3, ‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.’ So for the flesh; it enticeth us: James 1:14, ‘Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.’ Many times it draweth to actual sin by indulgence to its desires; yea, disposeth us often to apostasy and falseness of heart; for apostasy usually begins at falseness of heart, when the fleshly mind and interest is not thoroughly overcome. Well, when we are conscious to this, what shall we do in such a case? Certainly the great and proper work is to beg the Spirit, and implore the Spirit as a sanctifier, and to be more obedient to his sanctifying motions. Comfort will come in time.

Well, but the flesh is not only enticing, but troublesome and grievous to the saints; witness Paul’s groans: Rom. 7:24, ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver

me from the body of this death?’ We are quite wearied and tired out with the importunity of its motions; we would serve God more purely and perfectly. Then there is work for the Comforter, and confidence in his operations to help the faithful soul: Phil. 1:6, ‘Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ’ Then it is seasonable to remember the covenant we are under: Rom. 6:14, ‘For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.’ The serious, striving soul will not be left destitute. Thus must we expect comfort.

Use 5. Remember that comfort hath a latitude in it, and is expressed by divers words.

1. Sometimes by it support is implied, when the sense of sin and fear of God’s wrath is not altogether removed and taken away, but so mitigated and abated, that hope doth more easily prevail in the soul than fear; and we resolve to wait on God, though we cannot so fully clear up our interest in him. You have many conflicts and fears, yet some hope and expectation towards God: Jonah 2:4,5, ‘I am cast out of thy sight, yet will I look again to thy holy temple.’ Resolute adherence giveth great support: Job 13:15, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; I will maintain my own ways before him.’ He dependeth merely on the covenant.

2. Peace, or some rest from troubles and accusations of conscience. There is some calm and quiet of soul: Rom. 5:1, ‘Being justified by faith, we have peace with God;’ Gal. 6:16, ‘As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy.’ Assaulted with none or light fears: John 16:33, ‘In me ye shall have peace.’ I will give you peace, though not full spiritual comforts.

3. The third word is joy: 1 Peter 1:8, ‘Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.’ In peace all things are quiet, they have no anxious thoughts; but in joy there is a sensible motion of pleasure and delight. They are feasted with the pleasures of faith, love, and hope. Let us then bless God for any degree of comfort.

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