

Comfort In Trouble

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Pastor Bill Farrow

1. *Comfort in Trouble*

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

2. **“Blessing God”**

The idea of “blessing” God has taken on a shallow sense in these days.

Much of what passes for praise and worship is more me centered than it is truly God centered.

It is often more about my experience of praising and worshipping than it is about the act ascribing worth to God.

We praise as an outflow of our feelings, and the act of praise creates a sort of cycle that feeds upon itself and we end up using worship almost a kind of emotional narcotic.

We love doing it, not because of what God gets out of it, but because of what we get out of it.

Where most moderns think of God in spiritual terms (cf. John 4:24), the Old Testament freely uses concrete human imagery.

This is where we, as NT people, fall into difficulty, because we tend to try and interpret the OT in a NT fashion.

Just as an aside, we ought to be careful of this in general as well.

We think in a modern sense, and we tend project our modern way of thinking back on the past and believe that they “must have” thought this way” and valued things the same way we value things.

The OT freely and frequently used human imagery to speak of God.

Though clearly with complete understanding that all of this was imagery and not literal, in the OT man’s mind, God speaks, acts, walks, forms, fights, and repents.

He has hands, feet, eyes, a face, a back. He feels anger, anguish, pain, joy, expresses regret.

Usually thought of in male terminology, the Bible also uses female imagery.

Yahweh is the God of mercy and compassion (Heb. *raḥamîm*; cf. *reḥem*, “womb”; i.e., the one who shows maternal compassion).

Yahweh gave birth to Israel (Deut. 32:18), comforts them like a mother (Isa. 49:15), and pants and cries out as a woman in labor to bring Israel to salvation (42:14).

Yet amidst this imagery the Old Testament does not forget Yahweh's essential distinctness.

He is God, not man

- Hos. 11:9 –

*I will not execute the fierceness of My anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim.
For I am God, and not man,
The Holy One in your midst;
And I will not come with terror.*

- Isa. 40:25 –

*“To whom then will you liken Me,
Or to whom shall I be equal?” says the Holy One.
He is the Holy One whose ways surpass human understanding*

- Isa. 55:8–9 -

*8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.
9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

It is not until the LXX and the Targums that anthropomorphic language was systematically tempered (e.g., substituting an angel for God at Exod. 24:10).

3. More than a Metaphor

More than a metaphor, anthropomorphic language underscores the truth of God's personhood: Yahweh is the God who acts and maintains relationship.

He is intimately involved with the world and near to his people (Deut. 4:7).

*“For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord
our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?”*

He is the incomparable One who nonetheless invites reverence and trust (Isa. 46:3ff.).

*3 “Listen to Me, O house of Jacob,
And all the remnant of the house of Israel,
Who have been upheld by Me from birth,
Who have been carried from the womb:*

*4 Even to your old age, I am He,
And even to gray hairs I will carry you!
I have made, and I will bear;
Even I will carry, and will deliver you.*

*5 "To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal
And compare Me, that we should be alike? (etc)
Such imagery reflects God's condescension and accommodation.*

God descends beneath his loftiness to speak with people according to their capacity for knowledge, a capacity bestowed in virtue of their creation as his image bearers.

This self-giving finds its fulfillment and climax in the incarnation; in Jesus Christ, God takes human form to accomplish his revealing and reconciling purposes (cf. John 14:9).¹

- Once again, this all without any forgetting that God is not a man, or with any confusion about God's essentially differentness.
- Men desire blessing because there is something we either need or lack (or both).
- We turn to God for that which we do not already have and He supplies it, He blesses us with it some fashion.

When we thank God for blessings received we are thanking Him for giving to us that which we did not have and for that which we could not provide for ourselves either because we lacked ability or resource.

We are recognizing the necessity and goodness of His hand in our provision and experience.

Use this as a note and as a guide when you pray and when you offer thanks.

This must be the essence of your thanksgiving along with your own inability and your own need and appreciation.

4. But when we bless God, the story is very, very different!

It is true that we are created in God's image and there are many ways in which we can be said to be like God. But all of that must be taken in strict account with the truth that we are speaking about the one true and living God here. Our comparison goes from lesser to greater here, not from greater to lesser. What I mean by this is that we dare not define the entire set by the least part of the set.

Thanksgiving is above all not an act of selfishness of self-recognition. That is, it must not be "me centered", but must be Him centered.

¹ Myers, A. C. (1987). *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary*. Rev., augm. translation of: *Bijbelse encyclopedie*. Rev. ed. 1975. (426). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

5. *God Is Not A Man!*

God is not a man and we must not think of Him as man.

Though it is convenient and helpful, enlightening and instructive to us to think of our own nature in light of His, to do the reverse in disastrous.

The fundamental reason for this is that God is Holy – He is different – “Other”, which is the basic meaning of the word “Holy” in the Bible.

The word implies separation.

God is separated from everything in His essence – He is wholly and completely other – different.

This is why we must be careful of making the category mistake when we think of and especially, especially when we approach God.

This is perhaps the primary mistake we see time and again one TV and the radio.

Preachers make God a man and in so doing cheapen both He and His work.

First and foremost, this was why it was necessary for Christ to come and yield His life for sin, we were not able to approach God precisely because God is so very, very other, so very holy.

So many complain that God is bloody and that the cross was harsh and unnecessary – that is because they think of God as a man and do not understand that He different than we are.

Were God a man, they would be correct and God would be a tyrant.

But He is not as we are – and they are dreadfully and tragically wrong!

You and I could not meet the standard, either in general or in any of its’ parts necessary to stand before Him without requiring justice and thus meeting wrath instead of mercy.

This is true of worship and of the idea of “blessing God.

The definition of what this is is very different when it is headed from God in our direction than it is when it is headed from us in God’s direction.

In other words, when God blesses us, He is giving to us those things which we have not.

When we bless God, terms do not exist to express forcefully enough that we are NOT doing that.

We need to understand the reason why.

A. *God is Self-Existent*

The Self-existence of God is sometimes called the Eternity or independence of God.

It refers to the fact that God is an uncaused eternal Spirit.

His very essence is different than ours is.

It indicates that He is not dependent upon anything outside Himself.

He is self-sufficient in His existence, in His decrees, and in all His works. God has *“life in himself”* (Jn 5:26)

For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,

Acts 17:25

“He himself gives life and breath and everything”

To Israel, He revealed himself as the *“I Am”* (Ex 3:14), and He made Israel a covenant people for His own possession.

This Name speaks of God’s self-existence, of the uncaused nature of His Being.

This is why the Jews took up stones to kill Jesus when He applied that Name to Himself in John 8:58-59.

58 Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” 59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

They understood that the implications, at least some of them, of that Name meant deity.

It is only modern scholars in their wisdom that have *“figured out”* that what the language used there really meant!

God continues to work out His will in the world, and even though He uses various means, His independence remains intact.

Thus, He enters into fellowship with His covenant people, and He publishes the gospel through human agents.²

Man, on the other hand, is none of these things.

- None of this can rightly be said of him or of anything that he does.
- He has not existed eternally
- He was caused by something outside of himself.
- He is a temporal, though now immortal being.
- He depends entirely on things outside of himself for his existence and cannot live without air, food, etc.
- Man’s life is not within himself.
- Man does not reveal himself, but is a part of the creation and thus is a part of the apparent discoverable reality.
- Man cannot make his fellow man anything that he is not already in any real, meaningful spiritual sense.

That is why we bear witness to the truth of the Gospel and to the power of God, and do not go about doing our own works.

² Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). Tyndale Bible dictionary. Tyndale reference library (537). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

God is different than we are and when we come to Him in worship, seeking to bless Him, eulogew, bless the Lord O my soul, it must be with a different sense, than when we seek God's bless in our lives, for we have nothing to add to Him.

B. God Is Unchangeable

Immutability³ is a characteristic of God signifying that He does not change in His basic nature (Mal. 3:6), that is, in Who or what He is. In Him,

“...there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

God does not “mutate” from being one kind of God to being another, nor is He subject to the limitations of time and space, since in Christ He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3).

*He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End,
“...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8).*

Jesus Christ is “*the same yesterday, today, and forever*” (Heb. 13:8).

God is the God of steadfast love

Deut. 5:10

10 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Ps. 103:4

*Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,*

Is. 63:7

*I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord
And the praises of the Lord,
According to all that the Lord has bestowed on us,
And the great goodness toward the house of Israel,
Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies,
According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.*

6. God and the Appearance of Change

This is not to say that God does not appear to change.

Indeed, He frequently does appear to change.

We read, especially in the OT of what appears to be God changing His mind, His plan, His counsel, etc.

³ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary.; Includes index. Nashville: T. Nelson.

But that is looking at the short view, at the actions of God as He is involved in the history of man.

When we take the longer view, and seek to see His nature from His viewpoint we see a far different picture.

The Bible teaches that

- The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations. Ps 33:11
- Prov 19:21 deliberately juxtaposes the changeableness of man's plans with God's and tells us:

There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand.

- Tying the plan of God to one of His "power Names, Isaiah declares:
- The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, "Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand: Is 14:24

And again, this time challenging the scoffer:

- For the Lord of hosts has purposed, And who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, And who will turn it back?" Is 14:27

In a bold and challenging prophecy Isaiah says that even great kingdoms are under God's control:

- Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it. Is 46:11

Jeremiah speaks of God's unwillingness to relent from His purpose:

For this shall the earth mourn, And the heavens above be black, Because I have spoken. I have purposed and will not relent, Nor will I turn back from it. Jer 4:28

A. The NT teaches the same idea.

Paul teaches this grand theme in Romans 9-11

... (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), Rom 9:11

The writer to Hebrews says the same thing when he tells us:

Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, Heb 6:17

In His affairs in time, from day to day, as those matters work themselves out, it may appear as though God changes His mind and His plan, just as a road appears to change its direction.

But in the end, just as Route 23 always ends up where it is supposed to end up, so also God's plan is accomplished and does what He has purposed.

- He is a dynamic, living God who is constantly working (Jn 5:17).

- But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”
- Sometimes God is described as being sorry, repenting, or changing his mind

Gen 6:6–7 -

6 And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the Lord said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

1 Sam 15:11 -

11 “I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.” And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night.

Jon 3:10 –

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

In their contexts, such figurative expressions show the constancy of a God who, in holiness and righteousness, always abhors sin and reacts against it.

In his grace and mercy, he forgives the penitent, and he carries out his promises without fail

Ps 110:4 -

*The Lord has sworn
And will not relent,
“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Is 46:10 –

*Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure,’*

Jer 18:7–10 –

7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does

evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

Eph 1:11 –

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

Thus, the constancy of God is significant in all human relationships with him, including petitions offered in prayer.

This is another primary way in which God is different than we are...He always accomplishes His will and He never, ever changes His eternal purpose.

This is what we are to come and worship.

B. God Is Self-Sufficient

We are not self-sufficient, We all including the richest people have problems and needs.

- Sometimes people think, only if I win the lottery or have a millions of dollars I will be self sufficient.
- If we only look at the rich and we see that all the money they have cannot make them self sufficient and they have enough problems like any of us.
- God alone is self-existing and self-sufficient.
- He needs nothing, all things belongs to him and receives nothing into Himself.

"For every animal of the forest is mine, and a cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creature in the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." (Psalms 50:11-13)

Acts puts it very well in the context of worship for us:

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by humans hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." (Acts 17:25)

- God is not lonely, that he created humans to keep him company
- God did not lack glory so he created beings to supply him with glory.
- He did not lack love to create us to love him
- He did not need worshippers, so he created humans to worship him.
- God is not obligated to create anyone or anything.
- Creation is a sovereign act of God, as He is self sufficient in all his ways.

To believe in God adds nothing to His perfection or to doubt in Him does not take anything away from Him.

To speak of “Self sufficient” regarding God means, he does not need any helpers, but we all need help from him.

God does not trust in anyone, because he is above everyone, He alone trust in Himself.

He cannot put his trust in dying men, but we need to put our trust in him.

"For who in the skies above can compare with the Lord? Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings? In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him. O Lord almighty, who is like you?" (Psalm 89:6-8)

In contrast, He designed His creatures to be totally dependent upon Him for the life-force of their existence and for all they need.

He is the Giver; we are the receivers.

We must never confuse the roles and consider for one second that God needs anything from us, or that we have anything to give God that He receives into Himself.

It is ludicrous to think, as some say, that God created us because He needs something from us.

Since all that we have we received from God, all that we have was in God before He created us.

Obviously, God does not need from His creatures that which was already in Him.

How can He need something from human beings whom He designed to be totally dependent upon Him for everything?

Not even the most fanciful imagination can be stretched that far.

If God had any need within Himself that could only be satisfied by outside sources, then God would be incomplete and in disharmony with Himself.

There would be a rift in the internal fabric of God; a dissatisfaction with the makeup of His being; a minutia of disturbance swirling through Him in eternal unrest.

- Within Himself, God would not be at peace.
- He would not be content with Himself.
- Perfect and infinite joy would not be His.

C. God Is Transcendent, Infinite, or Eternal

God's eternity indicates his transcendence over time.

- He is timeless and everlasting.
- He has no beginning or end
- He does not undergo growth, development, or maturation.
- He existed before the creation of the world

- He dwells now in eternity; he will continue as the eternal God even when history ends.

Scripture speaks of God as

“Eternal” (Dt 33:27),

“The King” (1 Tm 1:17),

“The beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13).

He “inhabits eternity” (Is 57:15)

His “years have no end” (Ps 102:27; cf. 2 Pt 3:8).

Although God is above time and is timeless, time is his creation and history is the arena of his work.

“When the time had fully come God sent forth his Son” (Gal 4:4);

- Jesus Christ died on a Friday and rose on the third day.⁴
- The word transcendence means literally, "to climb across."
- It is defined as "exceeding the usual limits."

When we speak of the transcendence of God we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us.

- He is higher than the world.
- He has absolute power over the world.
- The world has no power over Him.
- Transcendence describes God in His consuming majesty, His exalted loftiness.
- He is an infinite cut above everything else.
- Isaiah was pointing to God's transcendence when he wrote,

To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. *“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?”* says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. [Isaiah 40:18-29]

⁴ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). Tyndale Bible dictionary. Tyndale reference library (538). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

And scripture records God's own testimony . . .

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. [Isaiah 55:8,9]

My point is that we enter worship to do just that.

The issue of worship is yielding to God what is His, not getting from God what we want or desire.

More than anywhere else, worship, whether together, or individually, worship is the place where we fulfill the purpose for which God made us.

7. *During the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War,*

Pastor Martin Rinkart faithfully served the people in Eilenburg, Saxony.

He conducted as many as 40 funerals a day, a total of over 4,000 during his ministry.

Yet out of this devastating experience, he wrote a “table grace” for his children which today we use as a hymn of thanksgiving:

*“Now thank we all our God, With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices!”*

What a fabulous demonstration of someone who has their eyes on the Lord and interprets their circumstances in light of what they know to be true instead of what they see around them.

It is understatement to say that this is difficult and even superhuman, but it is possible and necessary if we are to be the believers that God desires us to be and if we are to serve Him in the way He deserves to be served!

Circumstances can DESTROY our ability to be the servant, the slave the God desires us to be.

In fact, this is Satan’s desire.

He appeals to our flesh, because our flesh desires ease and comfort.

Our flesh desires that trial not be present.

But the fact is that it is through trial and difficulty that God is often brought the most glory.

Sadly, we are beings that need to be driven to God.

I wish it were not so, but it is.

Sin has so corrupted our nature that it is more natural for us to move away from Him than it to move toward Him.

It is more natural even for us as believers to retreat from Him and please ourselves than it is to seek after Him.

It is only by the process of sanctification that makes us like Christ that we overcome this fleshly plague and are transformed into the image of godliness.

8. VIII. Praise Him because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is because of Jesus Christ that we can call God “Father” and even approach Him as His children.

God sees us in His Son and loves us as He loves His Son (John 17:23).

We are “*beloved of God*” (Rom. 1:7) because we are “*accepted in the beloved*” (Eph. 1:6).

Whatever the Father did for Jesus when He was ministering on earth, He is able to do for us today.

We are dear to the Father because His Son is dear to Him and we are citizens of “*the kingdom of His dear Son [the Son of His love]*” (Col. 1:13).

We are precious to the Father, and He will see to it that the pressures of life will not destroy us.⁵

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). The Bible exposition commentary. “An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire ‘BE’ series”--Jkt. (2 Co 1:3). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.