

The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

Chapter 3: The Blessed Mourners

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Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted (Mt. 5:4).

Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh (Lk. 6:21).

The second beatitude in Matthew (Luke's third) tells us that the poor in spirit are also mourners. The verb used here (*penthountes*) "is the strongest word which is used for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, it is the word which is used of Jacob's grief when he believed that Joseph, his son, was dead (*Genesis* 37:34)."¹ The mourning described here is a profound and deep sorrow of heart that leads to weeping and bitter tears. The mourning spoken of in the beatitudes is not just any mourning, but a deep sorrow that is blessed by God. It is a mourning that flows from poverty of spirit, from being a Christian. Before we examine what a blessed mourner is, let us first examine the mourning that is not related to God's blessing.

Mourning That Is Not Blessed

There are a number of situations of mourning that are either worldly or common to society which our text does not describe.

First, there is the sorrow of the world which produces death (2 Cor. 7:10). It is not biblical sorrow, but sadness rooted in meaninglessness and despair. This kind of sorrow was found in Judas (the betrayer), who had deep regret and many tears over what his wicked actions did to Jesus. Judas, however, never repented of his sin. Interestingly, Judas did more than most in that he openly admitted his wrong and even gave the blood money back to the chief priests (Mt. 27:3-4). But, he did not turn back to God; his sadness was not a godly sorrow. He did not view his sin in terms of its awfulness in God's eyes but as a humanist, as someone who had already embarked on the road to autonomy. Therefore, instead of confessing his sin to God and looking to Jesus for forgiveness, he went out and hanged himself. He took his sorrow with him down into hell. A sorrow that is not connected to faith in Christ or repentance unto life (Ac. 11:18) is worthless and sinful.

Second, there is hypocritical sorrow of one who is caught and rebuked for sin. This is not a sorrow for having offended a thrice holy God; but, for experiencing the consequences of sin. There are many people who live double lives, one to serve secret lusts and another for public consumption. But when their sins are exposed they shed crocodile tears and confess their guilt. This sorrow, however, is not from the heart; it is not a spiritual sorrow rooted in poverty of spirit.

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press [1956, 58] 1975), 1:93.

It is a sorrow to be seen by men. Godly sorrow is sincere; it never makes excuses for sin. It is a sorrow that extends even to one's hidden life, even to the prayer closet.

Unbelieving Cain is an example of a man who was very concerned about God's punishment, yet who had no concern for or mourning over his grievous sin. He said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). There was no mourning which said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). There was no tear-drenched petition: "Have mercy on me, a sinner."

Third, there is the pretend sorrow of those who are trying to please men. The Pharisees went about with glum faces to impress the people (Mt. 6:16). Yet, we know that inwardly they were full of pride and self-righteousness. Their outward appearance of affliction was not connected to a genuine consciousness of sin or a holy character.

Fourth, there is a mourning common among all peoples for the general afflictions of life. Both believers and unbelievers grieve at the death of a loved one. People are greatly saddened by all sorts of things. But the sorrow described by Jesus is peculiar to believers. It can only come from the heart of those who are already poor in spirit. In the same way the poverty of spirit was not referring to finances, the mourning described is not a natural, but an essential, spiritual experience. It is mourning completely contrary to the natural man. It is a sorrow that the unregenerate cannot experience.

It is important that we search our hearts to make sure that we are not deceiving ourselves with a false sorrow, a sorrow that is not oriented to God but self. There are many people who shed tears with their eyes but not with their hearts. There are multitudes who mourn for the consequences of their sin, but who really do not care what God thinks. Let that not be any one of us.

Blessed Mourning

The type of mourning that Jesus blesses is a mourning that flows from being poor in spirit. It is a mourning caused by the Holy Spirit in the elect sinner. There are three things related to this spiritual mourning that flows from being poor in spirit.

First, there is the godly sorrow over our own sin and pollution. This kind of mourning both begins the Christian life and continues through it. We say it begins the Christian life because every genuine conversion to Christ begins with an acknowledgment of sin and a realization that our sin and guilt is heinous in God's sight. Because of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration the sinner sees the horrible evil of sin. This consciousness of the sinfulness of sin, our hopelessness, the excellencies of the divine nature and the love and compassion of Christ breaks the sinner's heart. The heart that mourns flees to Jesus because Christ removes the guilt of sin and breaks its power in life. This new man is miserable because of an enlightened conscience and he knows that he can only find relief in the Savior. Tears from sin can only be wiped away by the blood of Christ.

This is a very elemental doctrine of the faith, yet it is largely ignored in modern evangelical churches. People are either told to accept Christ with absolutely no preaching of the law or consciousness of sin; or, they are told to acknowledge the fact that they are sinners without anything deep or specific and then to "accept Jesus." Such preaching produces superficial, carnal "Christians" who have never mourned over their sins. Have you mourned over your sins? Have you ever felt like the sinful woman who came to Jesus in a Pharisee's house? Luke tells us that she "brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him

weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil” (7:37-38). Has your heart ever ached like the publican’s who cried in despair and mourning, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk. 18:13)? Have you ever sensed the wickedness of your heart and the unworthiness of your life like the prodigal son who said, “I will arise and go to my father, and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son’” (Lk. 15:18-19)? Have you ever wept bitterly over sin like Peter (Mt. 26:75; Mk. 14:72; Lk. 22:62)? Has a consciousness of sin and sinfulness cut you to the heart like it did to the three thousand souls that were saved on the day of Pentecost (cf. Ac. 2:37)?

A deep sorrow for sin is also necessary for our progressive sanctification. The verb *penthountes* is in the present continuous tense. The believer lives a life of sorrow for sin because the mortification for sin is never complete in this life. In fact, as a believer grows in grace and the knowledge of God’s holiness he is more aware of his own sinful conduct and inner depravity. Thus, he will repeatedly experience sorrow for his sin. He will die daily (1 Cor. 15:31) or lead a life of habitual repentance. As he is more and more sanctified, his knowledge of the sinfulness of sin increases. Thus, the more godly a believer becomes, the more sensitive he will become about offending God. A believer will mourn because he knows that sin is the opposite of loving Christ (1 Jn. 5:2, 3, 6); that sin is contrary to the Spirit of God within us; that sin was the reason the Savior was crucified. In a sense, sin pounded the nails into the Lord’s hands and feet and crowned Him with thorns.

Biblical sorrow is a result of a Spirit-directed conscience. “If conscience is not a bridle, it will be a whip. If it is not a curb, it will be a scourge. If you will not hear the warnings, you shall feel the lashings of conscience. If it does not restrain sin by admonition, it will put us to pain by contrition.”² We see this in King David whose heart smote him after he had numbered the people (2 Sam. 24:10). We also observe it in David’s painful groaning for his sin with Bathsheba: “When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer” (Ps. 32:3-4). The result of this sorrow is seen in the next verse. “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:5). David, as much as any saint, knew that “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, and a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). Thomas Watson writes,

The sinner admires himself. The penitent loathes himself. “Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils” (Ezekiel 20:43). A true penitent is troubled not only for the shameful consequence of sin, but for the loathsome nature of sin; not only the sting of sin but the deformed face. How did the leper loathe himself! (Leviticus 13:45). The Hebrew doctors say, the leper pronounced unclean was to put a covering on this upper lip, both as a mourner and in token of shame. The true mourner cries out, O these impure eyes! This heart which is a conclave of wickedness! He not only leaves sin but loathes sin. He that is fallen in the dirt loathes himself (Hosea 14:1).³

Mourning for sin is natural to the Christian because he hates it. He loathes his sins and sorrows over them every day. If he could stop sinning forever, he would do so in an instant. But,

² Samuel Bolton, “Sin the Greatest Evil” in *The Puritans on Conversion* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 2.

³ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 65.

because of the sin remaining in us (i.e. our flesh), sin will not be eradicated until we go to heaven. Therefore, our souls will be afflicted by this until we die. We are like Paul who said, “I am carnal sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:14, 15, 24). The believer is aware of this warfare between the regenerate mind and the law of sin within him. He groans under this wretched struggle. He has this experience of being totally disappointed with himself. Because of the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God to the heart, the Christian has a great desire to be holy and pure in heart. Thus, there is a sincere conflict against the motions of his lust and corrupt affections within him. The believer is aware of this conflict and his failings and he grieves over his failings and nature. Therefore, like David, he mourns and confesses not only his guilt but also his inner depravity. “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5).

As we contemplate Jehovah and His infinite holiness and think about our own condition, there is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. As we ponder deeds, thoughts and words that are contrary to God, that we have done, we loathe our behavior. We all know that we have much to mourn over. There are the sins of omission and commission that are committed every day. There is the ever deepening awareness of our inner depravity that, in a sense, pollutes all our thoughts and actions before God. There is the consciousness of the surging of unbelief, the lack of fervent love toward Christ, the deficiency of spiritual growth. All of these things cause a deep mourning before God. There is even the recollection of past failures before God that have present negative consequences. There is much to grieve the spiritually sensitive Christian. The more we know God, His Word and ourselves the more we will grieve. “The fact is that the closer the Christian lives to God, the more will he mourn over all that dishonors Him.”⁴

Beloved, do you mourn because you understand how offensive your sins are to God your Father? Do you mourn because you know that sin is the opposite of loving Christ, the blessed One who shed His precious blood on your behalf? Do you loathe your iniquities because you know they are an act of hostility toward God? Do you mourn over that which grieves the Holy Spirit? Spiritual mourning is a great blessing because it leads us to repentance. It causes us to cling to the cross of Christ. Paul writes, “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

The apostle tells us that there is nothing virtuous about sorrow itself. Virtuous sorrow is only something Christians do in response to sin as it relates to their continuing relationship with Christ. The sorrow that people of the world experience only produces death. “The sorrow of the world, indeed, is not something distinct from sin; on the contrary, it partakes of the very essence of sin. It is not sorrow because of the heinousness of sin as rebellion against God, but sorrow because of the painful and unwelcome consequences of sin. Thus the sorrow of the world manifests itself in self-pity rather than in contrition and turning to God for mercy.”⁵ We should all pray that God would increase our sorrow over sin so that we would be more diligent in the future and would, by faith, cling more tightly to our Savior.

Second, the believer not only mourns for his own sins, but also for the sins of others. Jeremiah mourned over the sin and judgment which came upon Judah. “My soul will weep in

⁴ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 19.

⁵ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 272-273.

secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock has been taken captive" (13:17). "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.... He has aged my flesh and my skin and broken my bones.... He has broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes" (Lam. 3:1, 4, 16). Ezekiel says that those who mourned over Jerusalem's wickedness would be spared God's judgment. "The LORD said to him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it'" (Ezek. 9:4). God through Zephaniah promised, "I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden" (3:18).

This is mourning over corporate sin. It is an affliction, a burden for God's visible church. Even our sinless Savior sorrowed over wicked Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37). In fact, His whole life and ministry are characterized by mourning. Isaiah called Him, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). No one understood the wickedness of sin and the consequences of sin more than Jesus; "that is why he wept at the grave of Lazarus. He saw this horrid, ugly, foul thing called sin which had come into life and introduced death into life, and had upset life and made life unhappy."⁶

These examples show us that individual believers are to have a strong concern for the church of Christ as a whole. There is to be a sympathetic mourning for the afflictions of others that leads to fervent prayer. There is to be a concern for the repentance and reformation of the visible church, especially in our own nation. When believers "weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15), they make common cause with others in their afflictions and help those suffering the pain of sorrow. Such sympathy can only strengthen the visible church and aid the cause of corporate sanctification. "It is not pleasant to weep; no one invites grief. But our love for others will constrain in us the sorrow of heart which the providence of God metes out to our brethren in Christ."⁷ "How much like Christ is the man who feels the sorrows and joys of others, as though they were his own!"⁸

Third, there are believers who mourn because of persecution. Previously, we have observed that persecution is a dominant theme in the beatitudes. Those who are faithful disciples in a wicked, unbelieving generation will receive persecution. This reality is coupled with a mourning over sin in Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, read this passage at Capernaum and said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21). The passage was originally applied (at least in part) to the exiles that were in bondage and affliction because of sin. The term "brokenhearted" refers to their inner condition as they mourned over their sin. The statement "the captives... and those who are bound" refers to their outward condition. The Messiah came to comfort those who are distressed over their sins, as well as those who are oppressed as believers. When understood in its full eschatological expectation, we see that the Savior's salvation is comprehensive and brings a complete and full comfort or deliverance.

The idea of suffering and mourning because of persecution is more prominent and obvious in Luke who follows the beatitude, "Blessed are you who weep now" (7:21) with "Blessed are you when men hate you" (7:22). The disciples of Jesus in the first generations of the

⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:59.

⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1959, 64] 1968), 2:135.

⁸ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1835, 64] 1972), 398.

New Covenant church suffered great affliction because of Jewish and then Roman opposition to the faith. Therefore, Christ comforts His disciples with the assurance that “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7:17; cf. 21:4).

Our Lord emphasizes that the Christian life is not all fun, joy and laughter. Many modern churches, especially of the “Charismatic” variety, think that being filled with the Spirit means a life of perpetual joy; that discipleship is easy. In fact, for them, blessing and mourning are contradictions. They demonstrate defeat, not God’s blessing. But this kind of Christianity reveals a lack of understanding of God’s holiness and His righteous law. Moreover, the doctrine of total depravity has been replaced with an optimistic—man is the captain of his salvation—spirit. Therefore, mourning over one’s sin and depravity is viewed as outmoded or even unbiblical. The blessedness of mourning has been replaced by the gospel of self-esteem. Sorrowing over sin has been rejected for “having your best life now.” Bewailing our iniquities has been jettisoned for the “laughing revival,” the coffee house service, the rock and roll jam fest. Our culture’s obsession with entertainment, serving our perceived needs and wants, trying to be happy and having fun all the time has permeated much of modern evangelicalism. Modern churches would do well to follow the example of Ezra who prayed, wept and bowed down because of the sins of the people of Israel (Ezra 10:1). Or, even the old English reformer Cranmer who set an excellent example of prayer when he wrote, “We acknowledge *and bewail* our manifold sins and wickedness.”⁹ Or, Paul who said, “I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced” (2 Cor. 12:21).

In Luke’s account we learn that people of the world will have the opposite experience of Jesus’ disciples. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep” (6:25). People who do not mourn over their sins, the sins of others or for the afflictions of persecution will laugh. That is, they are very happy in their heathenism. They have no concerns about God, Jesus, sin or holiness. They live for self, the present, sinful pleasures and are very happy and content to live a life of autonomy, a life without God. They are indifferent to sin as they lead lives of worldly ease, personal peace and affluence. Because they are their own god, they are completely unwilling to make any sacrifices whatsoever to follow Christ. They “are delighted in the things of earth, chasing pleasure after pleasure, are frivolous and giddy ‘now’—while it lasts.”¹⁰ Our culture is obsessed with vain amusements, carnal mirth, and frivolous entertainment. There is no contemplation of God or consideration of sin. People fill their lives with shallow amusements because they have not been enlightened by the Holy Spirit or embraced the gospel. Tragically, however, their shallow merriment will be turned into eternal weeping. Their failure to weep over their sins now and flee to Christ will result in mourning without intermission and without end. All those who forget God shall be turned into hell (Ps. 9:17) and shall be abandoned to wailing and gnashing of teeth.

They Shall be Comforted

Christian mourners are blessed because they will be comforted (Mt. 5:4). “Godly sorrow turns the soul toward God. God, in turn, grants comfort to those who seek help from him.”¹¹ The sorrow caused by the Holy Spirit always causes the elect sinner to look away from himself and his sin toward the Lamb of God. Thus, mourning by itself is not praiseworthy, but a spiritual

⁹ Thomas Cranmer as quoted in John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counterculture*, 41.

¹⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, [1946] 1961), 357.

¹¹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 271.

mourning that drives the soul to Jesus is indeed a great blessing. True comfort is not something in us. It is not caused by something subjective, but is founded solely upon the Mediator and His work. The comfort we receive from Christ corresponds to and meets the specific needs of all the various causes of mourning in the believer.

First, there is the comfort of being justified before God from all our sin and guilt. That great burden and despair that accompanies a consciousness of sin is lifted when the mourning soul clings to Christ. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). "Mourning over their sins, they shall be comforted, by the plain declarations of a free and full forgiveness, which, by the influence of the good Spirit, they shall be enabled to believe, and, 'believing which, they shall rejoice with joy unspeakable.'"¹² The greatest comfort that we know as believers is that the blessed Savior has washed away our sins and reconciled us to God. Without the removal of all of our sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, all other comforts would be temporary, fleeting and vain. "This Divine comfort is the peace of God which passeth all understanding, filling the heart of one who is now assured that he is 'accepted in the Beloved.' First God wounds and then heals."¹³

Second, there is the continued comfort that we receive as we mourn over our sins daily and confess them to God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). The moment a person believes in Christ he is justified before God. However, Christians continue to sin after they are saved (1 Jn. 1:8-10), even though their lives are not characterized by sin (1 Jn. 1:6). The sins that we all commit cause us to mourn. They distress our souls because we hate sin and detest offending our dear Savior. This godly sorrow which leads to daily confession also results in a daily comforting of our troubled consciences. As we confess our sins before God, He applies the blood of Christ and forgives the guilt of our sins. We see in Scripture that believers who have sinned against God do not receive comfort until they have first acknowledged, mourned and confessed their sins to God. Therefore, spiritual mourning is not only crucial to conversion, but also for the continued restoration of fellowship as we lead our very imperfect, sin-tarnished lives.

A true believer will bewail *all* his particular sins and be comforted by God. But, there are multitudes of people that deny their sins; who make excuses for their iniquities, who redefine sins away and thus do not mourn over them, confess them and receive comfort. Without the comfort of Christ's forgiveness they turn to alcohol, drugs, sex, or materialism. But none of these things can comfort the troubled soul. Thus, modern America is a medicated nation; a country drowning in antidepressants. People want comfort; they want peace for their guilt-ridden souls. But without the blood of Christ to wash away sin, they attempt to smother the symptoms and the root cause is left untouched. Oh, what a blessing we have in Christ! He removes all of our sins and restores us to God; and he restores our fellowship when we sin, mourn and confess. After groaning all day over his sin David was blessed: "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5). Beloved, let us mourn over our sins daily, confess them to God through Christ and be comforted.

Third, there is the comfort of being restored by God after being chastised for sin. After the Jews were judged by Jehovah, many repented and a godly remnant was comforted by God. Isaiah prophesied, "'Comfort, yes, comfort My people!' says your God. 'Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has

¹² John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, 1:119.

¹³ Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 20.

received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (40:1-2). "Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem" (52:9). "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (66:13). God wants His people to know that as a mother comforts her grieving son, He will comfort us. Ezekiel also spoke of Jehovah's loving comfort for His remnant: "Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, both sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, all that I have brought upon it" (14:22). "The mourner is heir to comfort, and though for a small moment God may forsake his people (Isaiah 54:7), yet there is a time shortly coming when the mourner shall have all tears wiped away, and shall be brim full of comfort."¹⁴

Fourth, there is the comfort that Christians receive from God for persecution and affliction by both temporal deliverance in history and the permanent deliverance believers receive in heaven. David often praised God for His deliverance from life's afflictions. "Hear, O LORD, and have mercy on me; LORD, be my helper! You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness" (Ps. 30:10). "Show me a sign for good, that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed, because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me" (Ps. 86:17). God spoke words of comfort to Judah through Isaiah saying, "Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And breakout in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted" (49:13).

Paul also spoke of this comfort: "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 tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation" (2 Cor. 1:3-7). Regarding this passage Hughes writes,

The word "comfort", whether as a noun or a verb, occurs no less than ten times in verses 3 to 7, building up in a characteristically Pauline manner a compelling impression of the comfort which God bestows upon His children. Paul employs the term here in its basic (Greek) sense of standing beside a person to encourage him when he is undergoing severe testing. This work of encouragement is indeed a work of the blessed Trinity: as Paraclete, the Father comforts and consoles us; as Paraclete, the Holy Spirit strengthens and guides us (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7—Greek); and as Paraclete, Jesus Christ the righteous is our Advocate with the Father and our Helper in the hour of temptation (1 Jn. 2:1; Heb. 2:18—Greek). The present tense of the verb shows that this God of ours comforts us constantly and unfailingly, not spasmodically and intermittently; and He does so in *all* our affliction, not just in certain kinds of affliction. If any one person knew the experimental proof of this great assurance it was the Apostle Paul, who later in this same epistle justly speaks of himself in comparison with others as "in labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft" (11:23). And the comfort God gives enables the Christian not only to *endure*, but even to *rejoice* "in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake" (12:10), so dynamic and vitalizing is its effect.¹⁵

¹⁴ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 100.

¹⁵ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 11-12.

There is the comfort that we will all receive in heaven. Although we are continuously comforted by God in this life, these experiences are earnestly pointing to our “everlasting consolation” (2 Th. 2:16). Thus, there is certainly an eschatological dimension to this comfort. In fact, Jesus uses the future tense because the sufferings of this life precede our eternal comfort, our everlasting Sabbath rest. Our comfort includes salvation in the broad sense of the term—glorification and presence with Christ in the eternal state of blessedness. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

God gives the ultimate comfort to His people by eliminating everything that hurts, or troubles us. There is a day coming when those who trust in Jesus receive the eternal reward that Christ merited, while their persecutors and oppressors receive the due recompense of their reward. This point is brought out very clearly in the case of the rich man and Lazarus. “Son remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented” (Lk. 16:25). The judgment of God brings a great reversal. The arrogant, unbelieving rich who lived in the lap of luxury on the earth will suffer and mourn, while the righteous poor who suffered great hardship and pain will rejoice. Believers who suffer deprivation and hardship now should rejoice because a day is coming when the tables will be turned; when those who wept shall laugh and those who rejoiced in their hedonism shall cry.

What a great day that shall be when the saints who were persecuted and dressed in rags shall be clothed with dazzling robes of white! What a blessed day when those who were chased out of their homes, who lived in constant fear; hiding in thick woods or caves, shall be given mansions in the heavenly city (Jn. 14:2 ff.)! What an amazing sight it will be when those who starved for the faith shall sit at Christ’s own banquet table (Rev. 19:9) and shall eat the blessed fruit from the tree of life in paradise (Rev. 2:7)! “Christ will lead his spouse into the ‘banqueting house’ and feast her with those rare viands, and cause her to drink that spiced wine, that heavenly nectar and ambrosia wherewith the angelic powers are infinitely refreshed”¹⁶

Some Further Applications

As we study the doctrine of gospel mourning there are some applications that need to be emphasized. These are things that we should do to increase our spiritual mourning before God.

First, we must carefully study the biblical teaching regarding God’s nature and character as well as His holy law. The more that we understand who God is, the more we will loathe our sins. One of the greatest reasons that gospel mourning is absent from many churches today is their gross ignorance of God’s holiness and righteousness. The biblical teaching on the love of God has been emphasized at the expense of the very attributes that the Bible discusses more than any other. Moreover, God’s moral law is a reflection of Jehovah’s righteous character. Dispensationalism in its many varieties has largely removed the preaching of the law from pulpits in our land. A meditation on God’s law and a personal application to ourselves everyday will greatly assist our sorrow over our sins.

¹⁶ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 101.

Second, we must pray for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to our sins and to cause us to hate our sinful behavior. We want sin to give way to biblical self-loathing which in turn causes us to continually rely on Christ and habitually repent of our iniquities. Progress in sanctification is dependent on a holy hatred of sin. Those who make light of sin and turn the grace of God into an excuse for carelessness must learn the necessity of gospel mourning.

Third, for the times in our lives when we do not feel the comfort of God, we must have a future-oriented outlook. The comfort of God will come. As Paul says, “we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:17-18). Even though there are times we do not feel God’s comfort, yet we still take comfort in Christ and His salvation.

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