

Comfort One Another

I've heard that the English language is very hard to learn, partly, because some words have many different definitions. For example, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "run" has about 645 meanings/definitions, depending on how the word is used. Likewise, the word "set" has about 430 meanings, and the word "go" has about 360 meanings.

The text that we're looking at today is used in the NT about 100 times has multiple meanings. The word does not have hundreds of meanings, but it has multiple meanings, all of which are important. That word is "comfort."

1Th 4:18 *Wherefore **comfort** one another with these words.*

1Th 5:11 *Wherefore **comfort** yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

We are continuing with our series on the "one another" passages from the NT, and today we consider what it means to "comfort one another." Today's message is basically a word study on this important term.

The word "comfort" (*parakaleo*) literally means "to call to one's aid," but the word means slightly different things in different contexts. As we consider how this word is used in the NT, we find about five main meanings or definitions, and each one of them tells us something about how to relate to other people in the church.

That does not mean that the word means five things in each passage. Often, the context where we find the word helps us understand the meaning. So one of these meanings will be most likely in any given passage that uses the word "comfort." The word is used in other contexts where it does not pertain to how believers relate to one another—we will not be considering those.

So we are looking at one word that is used in various ways, all of which are important. What does it mean to comfort one another?

I. Help one another.

- A. Probably the most basic sense of this word is simply "to help." Remember that the basic meaning of the word is "to call to one's aid." So one called to one's aid is a helper. To comfort is to provide help.
- B. You are probably aware that Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the comforter." The sense of this word seems to be that the HSp is a helper.

John 14:16 *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper (παράκλητος), that He may abide with you forever—*

John 14:26 *But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, ...*

- C. So to comfort others in this sense is simply to help them, to aid them in some way. We ought to be seeking ways to help others.
- D. The word is sometimes used of a particular kind of help, that is, legal assistance or advice. In this case, the word is translated as “advocate.” An advocate is a legal assistant or advisor, one who speaks on behalf of an accused person.
- E. Jesus is described as an advocate in

1 John 2:1... *if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

Jesus argues on our behalf before the court of heaven; he speaks to God in our favor. He intercedes for us.

Hebrews 7:25 ... *He ever lives to make intercession for them.*

App: So if we are to “comfort one another” in this sense, it simply means that we help one another. In particular, it may mean that we help someone by speaking on behalf of that person.

Have you ever helped someone in that way? Have you spoken on behalf of someone else? One way we can help one another is to speak up for others, put in a good word on behalf of others, to speak well of others for their benefit.

We can advocate for others; we can comfort one another by helping each other. One of the easiest ways to help others is to speak up for them.

Trans: Sadly, we are often guilty of speaking against others, criticizing them, speaking evil of them. We ought to be speaking well of others; we should be helping others by speaking on their behalf.

II. Comfort One Another.

- A. In English, the word “comfort” generally refers to showing sympathy or compassion to those who are suffering. In times of distress and sorrow, believers should rally around one another to offer comfort and support.

One of the most significant responsibilities church members have toward each other is that of comfort, consoling, and sympathizing with those who are grieving.

B. Texts:

Phil 2:1 *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any **comfort** of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercies,*

1 Thessalonians 3:7 ... *we were **comforted** concerning you by your faith.*

2Th 2:16 *Now our Lord Jesus Christ ... hath given us everlasting **consolation** and good hope through grace, **comfort** your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.*

Heb 6:18 ... *we might have a strong **consolation**, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*

C. As applied to church life, this meaning of the word suggests that members ought to sympathize with those experiencing pain and sorrow; “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15).

D. Sympathy for others comes from God’s sympathy for us. Since God comforts us, we can comfort others.

2 Cor 1:3-4 ... *the God of all comfort (θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως), who comforteth us (ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς) in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

That one passage uses the word “comfort” five times. Since God sympathizes with us and has compassion for us, we ought to comfort one another.

E. And we also find that this consolation/comfort is associated with the Word of God. We comfort/console one another regarding salvation and our eternal hope of heaven by reading and discussing the Word of God.

Rom 15:4 *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and **comfort** of the scriptures might have hope.*

We ought to use the Bible and biblical principles to bring comfort to those who are downhearted or suffering. In times of pain or distress, we ought to comfort one another through appealing to God’s word.

E.g., reading Ps 23 or John 14:1-3 or 2 Cor 5 at a funeral; cf., also some of the hymns we sing—Abide with Me.

Trans: People who are suffering need to hear from God; they need the comfort of God's word. We should show compassion and sympathy for those who are suffering.

III. Encourage One Another.

- A. One aspect of the word implies positive verbal encouragement. Comfort provides verbal encouragement for those who are experiencing difficult circumstances.

We can encourage one who is discouraged by using uplifting words or by giving good advice.

- B. Texts:

1Th 3:2 *[We] sent Timothy, ... to establish you and **comfort/encourage** you concerning your faith,*

Ac 15:32 *Judas and Silas, ... said much to **encourage** and strengthen the brothers.*

Col 4:8 *I am sending him to you ... that he may **encourage** your hearts.*

1Pe 5:12 *... I have written briefly, **exhorting**, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.*

- C. A comforter is a supporter, one who is on your side to help encourage you through the difficulties of life. We ought to support and uplift one another verbally, especially when we are going through hard times.

Trans: We can express our thanks for one another. A compliment and an encouraging word can be very supportive and helpful. We want to encourage and strengthen the brethren by using uplifting words.

IV. Ask one another.

- A. The word can simply mean “ask,” in the sense of pleading or begging.

Mr 5:18 *... he that had been possessed with the devil **begged** him that he might be with him.*

2Co 5:20 *... as though God did **beseech** you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

1 Pe 2:11 *Dearly beloved, I **beseech** you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;*

B. In some contexts, the word means “ask for help.”

C. Texts:

Mt 8:5 *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, **beseeking** him [to heal his servant].*

Lu 7:4 *And when they came to Jesus, they **besought** him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:*

Mr 5:23 *And **besought** him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.*

Many people asked Jesus for help, especially for healing or deliverance from some illness.

D. What does this mean for us?

1. It implies that Christians ought to feel free to ask one another for assistance. We are sometimes reluctant to ask for help, but we should not be. One of the great blessings of the Christian life is that fellow believers are available to help us in our time of need.

2. Following Jesus' example, Christians should help those in need when possible. When someone asks for help, we ought to be ready to help.

Many of us have helped one another with projects and various problems. That's proper and good. Our attitude should be that we are available to help others in a time of need.

Trans: So one main idea inherent in this word “comfort” is to ask for help and to be willing to help when asked.

V. Exhort One Another.

A. The word “exhort” is a certain kind of asking. In some contexts, the word means, “to make an appeal, to entreat, to urge or press strongly, to insist.”

B. Texts:

Lu 3:18 *And many other things in his **exhortation** preached [John the Baptist] unto the people.*

Ac 2:40 *And with many other words did he testify and **exhort**, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*

Ro 12:1 *I **beseech** you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Eph 4:1 *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, **beseech** you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

Heb 3:13 *But **exhort** one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Heb 13:22 *And I **beseech** you, brethren, suffer the word of **exhortation**: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.*

- C. To exhort is a little bit different from encouraging.
 - 1. When we *encourage* someone, we try to lift him up by using supportive language.
 - 2. When we *exhort* someone, we are appealing to him to do something or take some action. Exhortation is asking someone to do something or quit doing something.

Encouragement says, “You are doing a great job! Keep up the good work.” Exhortation says “Quit messing around. Get back to work.”
- D. The exhortations we find most commonly in the NT are appeals to righteous behavior/conduct. We exhort people to do the right things and quit doing the wrong things. We might call this admonition—i.e., a verbal warning or rebuke.
- E. Christians ought to challenge or warn one another regarding proper behavior and attitudes.
 - 1. We confront those who fall into sin.
 - 2. We confront those who are heading the wrong direction or who are doing something foolish or unwise. Sometimes it’s not so much a matter of sin involved, but something inappropriate or dangerous that we use strong, pointed exhortation.
- F. When others warn or rebuke us, we need to accept it graciously. Those who warn us or rebuke us are doing us a favor; they are helping us to go in the right direction; they are providing spiritual aid for us.
- G. Christians ought to be strongly persuading one another to do conduct themselves righteously. We should be beseeching and exhorting one another toward honorable, God-glorifying behavior.

Hebrews 10:24 *And let us consider one another in order to provoke/stir up to love and good works,*

- H. Peer pressure, in this sense, is a positive thing. It's proper for us to urge fellow Christians toward biblical living. We want to stir up one another toward godliness and right behavior.
- I. The world is full of evil influences. Each of us should be an influence for good by exhorting one another toward love and good works.
- J. And we should appreciate it when others exhort us toward godliness, righteousness, and holiness. We need that encouragement and motivation sometimes. We should not resent it when others point out areas that need attention or improvement in our lives. We should accept exhortation graciously.

Paul exhorts us to "comfort one another." As we look closely at how this term is used in the NT, we find that it has a wide variety of meanings. Each one of the nuances of this term is important and gives us guidance for Christian living.

All Christians should affirm the responsibility they have to fulfill the implications of this word:

1. help one another;
2. sympathize with each other when facing distress and sorrow;
3. encourage one another with positive words;
4. ask one another for help and be willing to help those who ask;
5. strongly appeal to one another to do the right thing, to conduct ourselves properly.

You'll notice that most of these meanings pertain to verbal communication. How we communicate with one another is very important. We should be intentional in our efforts to use helpful, sympathetic, encouraging, and appealing words to fellow believers.

Let's make sure that the words we use bring comfort and help.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 *Therefore comfort one another with these words.*