

But God, who comforts the downcast,
comforted us by the coming of Titus.

2 Corinthians 7:6 NIV

a Tangible Solace



William Bouguereau

For thus says the high
and exalted One
Who lives forever,
whose name is Holy,
“I dwell on a high and
holy place,
And also with the
contrite and lowly of
spirit
In order to revive the
spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart
of the contrite.”

Isaiah 57:15

THIS WRITER HAS LONG LAMENTED the Godhead’s decision to leave believers stranded on terra firma, rather than draw them up to heaven at the moment of their justification. That is not to say that I regret the innumerable blessings of this life, but that I regret the fragility of flesh, and its susceptibility to temptation and sin. It would have been so much easier if personal sanctification were completed in the milliseconds after conversion (thus short-circuiting the pains of earth-bound failure), and we were transferred immediately into the purity of heaven.

Also eliminated in such a post-salvation economy would be such things as regret, loneliness, sorrow, alienation, frustration, dejection. But therein lies a clue to one of the foremost reasons God chose to leave us behind.

I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

1 Corinthians 16:17-18

Followers of Christ do not just have work to do on earth, both within and without the kingdom; they have been left for each other. The Holy Spirit is our great supernatural comforter, and we cannot deny the worth of His ministry in our lives. But flesh responds more naturally to fellow flesh, and while we remain *in* the flesh our greater treasure may be the consolation of

a brother or sister in Christ. The Spirit is no less real, but a fellow believer come to our aid is a more tangible solace.

The appearance of flesh, however, should not fool us into thinking this a purely temporal consolation. God—in one or more of His parts—is as much at work in the comfort of a brother or sister as if He were bodily standing before us. He is the one placing the impulse in the human heart. He is the one sending forth His holy messengers to be His hands, His voice, His heart. He is the one loving us through them.

“Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance,
And the young men and the old, together,
For I will turn their mourning into joy
And will comfort them and give them joy for
their sorrow.”

Jeremiah 31:13

Too often the promise of security in the hereafter blinds us to the earthly benefits of life in Christ in the present. Every believer has already begun his or her eternal life; there need be no waiting for the joys, the rewards, the sweet communion of the Lord. We enjoy His very real presence right now, and no less when in need of encouragement and comfort. In that moment the Lord God sends out His servants, His children to minister in His name.

We are to recognize His presence in that moment of need—and we are to answer the call when it is *our* turn to be His hand of comfort.

