

THE CHRIST PERFECTED BY SUFFERING

"Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are made partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." – 1 Pet. 4:13.

IT MIGHT at first seem strange to God's people that they should suffer special trials and difficulties as a result of becoming children of God and doers of that which is good. The natural expectation would be that he who sins shall suffer, and he who seeks to avoid sin shall be blessed. This is a natural law, and it will operate in due time – during the Millennial reign of our Lord. Evil-doers shall suffer stripes, and if found persistent, shall be cut off in the Second Death. But all well-doers shall be rewarded with everlasting life and blessing forever.

This is not true now, however, for the reign of the Prince of Righteousness has not yet begun. We are under the reign of the Prince of Darkness. And the evil-doers often have great success, while the right-doers suffer. David says of the wicked, "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish." (Psa. 73:7.) Nevertheless he took his stand with those who would please God – and so also do we.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN TESTING US

St. Paul, speaking concerning the Church of the Gospel Age, says, "**All** that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12.) There is ***no exception*** to this rule; and the knowledge and expectation of this should make us stand ***fast***, having on the breastplate of righteousness, and having our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace.

God allows His people to have these experiences and to suffer for right-doing. In the present time He is calling out a saintly

company. This company will be the Royal Priesthood of the future, to bless all the world during Messiah's Reign. And the Bible explains to us that these need trials to prove and test their characters.

God wishes to see how loyal we are to the principles of righteousness. How much are we willing to suffer? It is a saying with the world, "Every man has his price." And so in the Church there are some who would endure a certain amount, and then back down. Others will endure a little more, and others still a little more. The Lord declares that He is seeking those who will give up everything in order to prove faithful to their Covenant with Him. This faithfulness means entire loyalty to God, to His laws, which are the laws of righteousness.

THE FIRE TO BURN AMONGST YOU

The intimation that these fiery trials will try the Church, will burn amongst God's people, does not necessarily [R5778 : page 298] mean that *all* the fiery trials will come from the *Church*; but that these trials constitute a fire that is to do a purifying work amongst them, burning in their midst. It is an experience that must be endured by each one individually. It will be a general experience, because each one must have a share in this matter. It is not merely that the company as a whole will have opposition against them, but that each individual will be personally exposed to the fiery trials. Therefore this fire burns in our midst and will burn to the end.

It is a different kind of trial from what could come to any other body of people. The explanation of this difference is in our text – "inasmuch as we are made partakers of Christ's sufferings." When we know that each member of the Body of Christ must be tried, we can rejoice when some of this fire touches us. We say, "I am having a share in the sufferings of Christ. I am glad that in God's providence I have a share in these trials; for if I had no share in them, how could I know that I am one of the Body members?"

THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF TROUBLE

So we all rejoice, knowing that these fiery trials are of the Lord. Not that the Lord is the *cause* of these fiery trials; for usually it is the Adversary. But we have put ourselves into the Lord's hands, and He has promised to supervise all that concerns us. Therefore, whatever comes to us, we may be sure that it is of the Father's purpose, or permission for our good. If, therefore, we recognize that this is something that the Lord's providence has arranged for us, it is all right, no matter how frequently we have to go to the Throne of Grace for help in time of need.

God has revealed to us that He purposes to give to The Christ very great exaltation, great glory, honor and immortality. Therefore we are looking forward to the time when this Body shall be perfected, and we shall share in the glory of our Head. When the glory shall be revealed, we shall be glad with a great joy! These trials that come to us are from a variety of sources. In our context they are spoken of as the *one* trial of the Church, but that one trial is made up of a variety of experiences. If these difficulties and trials came all at once, they might be too severe for us. Therefore the Lord permits us to be taken out of the fire for a little while. "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." – Psa. 103:14. [R5779 : page 298]

TORTURES OF TODAY MORE REFINED

And so the Father has arranged that we shall have little seasons of refreshment between times, so that when the next trying experience comes, it will find us a little stronger and more ready to profit by it. Some of these trials come from the Adversary himself. Apparently the things that have been done to the Church could come from none other. Think of the devilish disposition manifested toward our Lord, and reflect upon His sufferings. We cannot think that mankind under any ordinary conditions could ever have had so malicious a spirit as that manifested against Him. The Devil had to

do with all the wicked persecutions of the saints – the cutting out of tongues, the racking of their poor bodies, and the shooting out of *bitter words* from the *tongue*.

We are more used to this latter form of persecution today than in olden times; for the world – the average man – would not permit the things done in the Dark Ages. But the wicked feelings are still there – the animosity, the gall. As the Apostle James says, the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, and it sets on fire the course of nature. (James 3:6.) And so in our day the tongue and the pen are often used as weapons of evil.

We have all noticed, perhaps, how willing the world is to *speak* evil and to *believe* evil – how willing to say that which they do not know. This is all because they are obsessed, besieged by the Adversary. But we are living in a more civilized day than were our brethren of the past. We think the individual who does these wicked things today – who slanders and vilifies God's people – is under some malevolent influence. And then the temptation comes to us to speak evil of them in return – to do all the harm we can against them. If we find this disposition to speak evil arising within us, we are to resist it, to allow the fire of this time to burn up these elements of our old nature. And the fire will have this purifying effect upon us, if we receive it aright, making us meet for the Heavenly Kingdom.

SECONDARY SOURCE OF TRIAL

Not only from the Adversary do these trials come, but they come from the weaknesses and the imperfections of others. And perhaps those that come from the brethren are the most difficult to bear. We know that "the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not." But when it comes to those who have made a profession of loyalty to God, and who have named the name of Christ, whether they be Presbyterians or Episcopalians, Baptists or Congregationalists, or those who are Bible Students – if in any of

these we find the persecuting spirit, we are more discouraged and less likely to have the proper sympathy for them.

We are to remember, however, that nothing can happen to us unless the Father permits it. If we did not get the trials from Methodists or Presbyterians or Bible Students, we would get them from somewhere else, in order to burn up our dross and strengthen the elements of our character which need development. We are to take all of these things patiently, knowing that they are working out for us a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." We are to look away from these things and to recognize the grand purpose of God. We are to reflect that this is the way in which God is chiseling us and polishing us to make us ready for the grand Temple of Glory. And when we think of this, we can look with fortitude and patience on these fiery trials, recognizing that we shall get a blessing out of them.

"Through many a thorny path He leads
My tired feet;
Through many a path of tears I go,
But it is sweet
To know that He is close to me –
My God, my Guide;
He leadeth me, and so I walk
Quite satisfied."

Thus we learn as people of God to *glory*. We may glory in all the things which He has done *for* us and *in* us. The things that naturally would be least likely to be gloried in are tribulations, persecutions. But we may glory also in these. We may rejoice in them – not that we enjoy the tribulations, the persecutions, but we realize that these are working for us characters pleasing to God. The Lord will see to it that we get enough, and not too much, tribulation.

The word *tribulation* has the thought of serious trouble – a combination of troubles that makes the experiences serious. It

would not mean that we would fall into some difficulty and soon get out of it again, but it would mean severe and continued trouble. Sometimes we cannot see why we have the troubles that come to us. They may come in the form of sickness, or death, or financial trouble, or humiliation of our unrecognized pride and self-love; or we may have a combination [R5779 : page 299] of trouble. There is no difference whether it is one kind or another kind – they are *tribulations*. But it is for us to recognize that in all these trials the Lord supervises and makes them work for our good.

The *world* has persecutions of a certain sort. People in business will sometimes persecute one another. Sometimes persecutions are in a political way. The Lord indicates to the Church that we may rejoice in any persecution, especially if we are in no way *blame-worthy*. "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed [feel disgraced]," said the Apostle. (1 Pet. 4:14-16.) He is suffering because the "darkness hateth the light," and slanders the Truth. This has been so from Jesus' time all the way down.

BLESSING RESULTING FROM PERSECUTION

Shall we say that we will not be reconciled to any certain experience? No; we have committed all to the Lord, and it is for us to bow in full submission, knowing by faith and from the assurance of God's Word that all things are working together for good to us. No matter what the trouble may be, it will bring patience if we are rightly exercised. Some of the Lord's people may have patience well developed, and thus not need so many of these experiences. But whatever we *need*, we should desire.

We remind you again of the story of a certain brother who took account of his qualities, and decided that he was most lacking in *patience*. Then he prayed most earnestly to the Lord to give him more patience. He kept on praying; and the more he prayed, the more difficulties he seemed to have, the greater trials of patience. Then it occurred to him that this was the answer to his prayer; for

that was the way to get patience. And when he began to see the matter aright, it encouraged him and made a great change. He saw that the Lord was answering his prayer by giving him the very experiences he needed to develop in his character this grace of the Spirit.

"Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." This does not mean that we get all of our patience first, then all of our experience, and then all of our hope; but that they are all developing together. We have a good courage and are desirous of pleasing the Lord; we are not ashamed to be His children. And the reason why we are not ashamed is that with this hope, we have the realization of God's love; and we are able to say, "If I had *tribulation*, I now have more *hope* and more *patience*. I am getting the results in these tribulations, in the fruits of the Spirit." Whoever escapes experiences that would develop the fruits of the Holy Spirit will never gain a place in the Kingdom.

Patience can be gained *only by trials*. Faith can be developed *only by necessities*. We have need of preparation for our future work. This can be gained only by those experiences which will touch us with a feeling of the infirmities and difficulties and trials of the groaning creation to whom we shall be ministers and representatives when we reach the Throne. For us, then, the lesson of present experiences is to resist evil; not with evil, but with *good*. "Be not overcome of evil; but resist evil with good." – Romans 12:21.

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