

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

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First John 4:8 declares that “God is love.” As part of his loving nature, 2 Corinthians 1:4 states that God is the “God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our tribulation.” The same verse also teaches us that God comforts us “that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Cor 1:4). The kind of “trouble” that Christians are given this comfort for are the sufferings of Christ. *“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation”* (2 Cor 1:5-6).

A glorious kind of trouble

There are two major kinds of suffering. One kind of suffering is that which comes as a consequence for wrongdoing. *If we do something wrong, then this kind of suffering (i.e. chastening) is necessary for us so that we can become partakers of God’s holiness* (Heb 12:5-13). But, though this kind of suffering is necessary, there is no *glory* in it: “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently (1 Pet 2:20)?” The other kind of suffering is that which comes as a result of doing what is good and right. Those are the sufferings of Christ. Christ *never* suffered for doing wrong, because he never sinned (Heb 4:15; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). The only kind of suffering that Jesus partook of was for obeying His Father (Luke 24:25-27,44-46; John 7:7; 8:28-29; 15:18-25; Acts 3:18; 17:2-3; 26:22-23; Heb 2:10; 5:8-9; 1 Pet 3:18; 4:1-2).

Taking it patiently

God has *called* all Christians to partake of the sufferings of Christ, to endure suffering for doing well. *“For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls”* (1 Pet 2:19-25; see also 1 Thes 2:14-15). “Taking it patiently” literally means *enduring* suffering for righteousness’ sake. The Lord defines this endurance as *“not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing”* (1 Pet 3:9). Jesus never returned evil for evil (1 Pet 2:22-25), but only good for evil (Luke 22:49-51; 23:33-34). Likewise, when suffering for well doing, we must not rebel against God by returning evil for evil, but instead we must follow Christ’s example of enduring sufferings for righteousness’ sake by returning good for evil (Matt 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36). And it is essential that we *only* partake of Christ’s sufferings and avoid suffering for wrongdoings. *“For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well*

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(continued)

doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet 3:17-18). "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet 4:12-16). It is a guarantee, a promise that we will suffer for obeying God: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim 3:12), and "unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Php 1:29; see also Matt 13:20-21 and Mark 4:16-17 where it says "when" we suffer tribulation because of the word, not if we suffer).

The blessings of partaking of Christ's suffering

The scriptures also teach us that the sufferings of Christ are a blessing. "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (1 Pet 3:14). Similarly, Matthew 5:10-12 says, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt 5:10-12; see also Luke 6:22-23; John 15:18-25). The reason that we are told to endure the sufferings of Christ and to even rejoice when they come is for the good that those sufferings produce. Yes, we will have a great eternal reward in heaven for having partaken of Christ's sufferings (Matt 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23; Rom 8:17-18; 2 Tim 2:12). This is the reward of salvation that is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 1:6. But there is also a great benefit to those sufferings that we partake of immediately. Enduring sufferings for righteousness' sake is the means by which we grow to be perfect (complete) like Christ. Jesus was made perfect through sufferings (Heb 2:10; 5:8-9). And as Christ learned obedience by suffering for righteousness' sake, so we also must arm ourselves likewise with the same mind and learn to cease from sin and to live the rest of our time in the flesh to do the will of God, not the lusts of men (1 Pet 4:1-2). James 1:2-4 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (see also Rom 5:3-5; 1 Pet 1:6-7). "But the God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet 5:10). Jesus was made perfect through sufferings, and the sufferings of Christ need to abound in us so that we also grow to perfection. This is part of the reward of consolation that is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, one of the good and perfect gifts from the God of all comfort!