



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume IX
Issue 203

Suffering: God's Forgotten Gift

Part I

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29).

Two gifts given to the believer are mentioned by Paul in Philippians 1:29. The first is “to believe on Him.” This is a glorious gift. Every believer has been given this gift from God. Those who possess it may not even fully recognize it as a gift from Him, but indeed faith is God’s wonderful gift to us. Paul mentions this gift also in his letter to the saints at Ephesus:



PAUL: THE SUFFERING APOSTLE

Paul, our Apostle – the Apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13) – was given a special ministry of suffering. Ananias was sent by the Lord to bring him a message of,

... How great things he must suffer for My Name's sake (Acts 9:16).

*For by grace are you saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: **it is the gift of God** (Ephesians 2:8).*

Paul also speaks of this great truth to the believers at Rome,

*... **God has dealt** to every man the **measure of faith** (Romans 12:3).*

Faith is a rich gift from God, but there is also another gift from God to the believer, mentioned by Paul in Philippians 1:29, that is equally as glorious. The second gift is “also to suffer for His sake.” This, too, is a glorious gift. Every believer has been given this gift from God as well, but those who possess it often do not fully recognize it for what it is. Indeed, suffering for His sake similarly is God’s wonderful gift to us. Paul teaches us to embrace this second gift as well as we do the first!

The latter part of the book of Acts and Paul’s own letters are filled with the accounts of this great suffering. Writing to the Corinthian believers Paul catalogs some of his sufferings:

Of the Jews five times I received forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brothers; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (II Corinthians 11:24-27).

As the believer reads Paul’s letters he is taught the

(see **SUFFERING**, page 1963)

Dear Precious Family,

The Nicest Summer I Have Ever Lived

As you probably know I prefer colder weather. My favorite season of the year is winter, followed by spring and fall. Summer, oh well, not so much.

Here in Pennsylvania we have had a really mild summer. There have been only a few really hot days so far. As I write this I am sitting out on the deck and a gentle cool breeze is blowing. Our average temperature for July was 69 degrees (an average of the daily highs and lows for the month). We have not even had the air conditioner on yet this year. In fact, it is the nicest summer I have ever lived.

Family Holidays

In our family we have "Family Holidays." "Federal" holidays are nice, I guess. Many get a day off – some even with pay – a sort of "national" vacation.

These "holidays" of course are purely man-made days of honor, recognition and celebration. In many ways they are meaningless events to our own family. Since the bank and post office are closed (a part of our daily business life), we usually follow suit and enjoy the opportunity to spend some time with family or friends.

Our family does however set aside our own days for "holidays." They are days that are important to our family – days of honor, recognition and celebration. The main ones are family members' birthdays and anniversaries. We close down and take the day off as a family. We break out the celebratory gear and do special things, and why not? After all, these are the days that are really special to our family!

Joints and Bands

We have started a new fellowship blog at:

www.JointsandBands.com

This is a place where you can network with other believers who rejoice in *the salvation of all*. It's brand new, so be one of the first to post your contact information. More details are on the back page.

Until next week, my love to each of you,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Bible Student's Notebook™

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God's Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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SUFFERING (continued from page 1961)

enormous value of suffering – as Paul had learned and experienced it. Today, much teaching related to suffering is centered on the idea of “deliverance.” Yet suffering is a gift of God, and actually plays an important role in the lives of the members of Christ’s Body, as we shall see.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (II Corinthians 4:17).

WHAT IS SUFFERING?

James Strong gives us some words by which we can glean a better understanding of the word “suffer”:

hardship, pain, affliction, lack (insufficiency), trouble, pressure, etc.

Webster defines suffering as “the bearing of pain, inconvenience or loss.” Of course, the key here is the word “bearing.”

What does the Scripture teach concerning suffering?

It Is God’s Gift to the Believer:

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29).

It Is the Believer’s Appointment:

That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto (I Thessalonians 3:3).

It Is a Spiritual Fruit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering ... (Galatians 5:22; c.f. I Corinthians 13:47).

Our English word “longsuffering” is a compound word, i.e., “long” and “suffering,” which means to suffer a *long time*. Spiritual fruit does not include “deliverance;” quite the contrary, it produces God’s

attribute of longsuffering in the life of the believer.

It Is Actually Christ’s Sufferings Which Believers Are Called to Bear:

*Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and **fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh** for His Body’s sake, which is the church (Colossians 1:24).*

*For as the **sufferings of Christ abound in us** (II Corinthians 1:5).*

*But rejoice, inasmuch as you are **partakers of Christ’s sufferings**; that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy (I Peter 4:13).*

GOD’S CURRENT ANSWER TO SUFFERING

*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the **God of all comfort; Who comforts us 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. For as the **sufferings** of Christ abound in us, so our **consolation** also abounds by Christ. And whether we are **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 are **comforted**, it is for your **consolation** and salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as you are partakers of the **sufferings**, so shall you be also of the **consolation** (II Corinthians 1:3-7).*

It should be noted that God’s current method of handling our sufferings is through divinely enabled endurance, not through “deliverance.” Again, longsuffering, NOT deliverance is part of the spiritual fruit that goes hand in hand with our Father’s grace.

Concerning God’s grace, Paul had this to say regarding his own “*thorn in the flesh*”:

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that ►

it might depart from me. And He said unto me, **"My GRACE IS SUFFICIENT** for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (II Corinthians 12:8-10).

God's current method of dealing with us is not through deliverance from our suffering; but through His all-sufficient grace He strengthens us with divine consolation and comfort, resulting in Christ's power resting on us. It is the divine paradox that, when we are weak, then we are strong. It is in the very midst our physical, emotional, mental, financial and social weaknesses that we find an abundant spiritual strength flowing forth from the Father.

Paul starts off II Corinthians with this amazing cornerstone of divine life (chapter 1, above), and then near the very end of his letter he reveals how this principle had been divinely activated in his own life (chapter 12, above). Paul not only taught this, but he was the divinely chosen Apostle of suffering, to live this truth – so much so that he wrote also in the same letter,

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus's sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death works in us, but life in you (II Corinthians 4:7-12).

The manifestation of Christ's life in us is found in the weakness and frailty of our humanity.

DIVINE COMFORT AND CONSOLATION IN SUFFERING

Life is an ever recurring series of struggles, disappointments, sadness, sufferings and heartbreaks. Yet it is in our brokenness that God chooses to manifest His divine comfort, for, indeed, our Father is the "God of all comfort."

*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the **God of all comfort** (II Corinthians 1:3).*

... *The **God of patience and consolation***
... (Romans 15:5).

Both of the words "comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3) and "consolation" (Romans 15:5) in the *King James Version* are translated from the same Greek word *paraklesis*. It is a compound word from the roots *para* meaning "beside," and *kaleo* meaning "call." Thus the *Concordant Keyword Concordance* gives us the meaning as "beside-calling," which is confirmed by others:

A calling near, a summons to one's side. – E.W. Bullinger, *Critical Lexicon*

A calling to one's side. – W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*

Noah Webster gives the etymology of our English word "console" as,

To give rest or quiet, or the sense is to strengthen, in which case it coincides with the root of solid.

He goes on to define the word as,

To comfort; to cheer the mind in distress or depression; to alleviate grief, and give refreshment to the mind or spirits; to give contentment ... – *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828)

The Father has called us *beside* Himself, so that we may find true comfort. What better place than at the Father's side to find consoling? For He Who is the "God of **all** comfort [consolation]" is the only source of divine "solace" (James Strong, *Greek Lexicon*).

COMFORT AND CONSOLATION: OUR DIVINE CALLING

Comfort and consolation are a crucial part of our Father's calling in our lives, for He has called us to,

... *Be of good comfort* (II Corinthians 13:11).

Our Father, "*the God of all comfort*" (II Corinthians 1:3), consoles us in our pain, anguish, distress, frustration, sorrow and brokenness, so that we may learn how to console others who are hurting around us. This *paraklesis* or, "beside-calling" is just that: a divine "calling" of the Father – our divine calling – that He may use the same comfort with which He consoles us, to bring consolation to the hearts and lives of others.

Who comforts us 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 (II Corinthians 1:4).

This is our divine calling. This is His method of preparing us for *real* ministry – the ministry of genuine consolation, that exact same consolation that we have received from our Father – to those who are now experiencing similar troubles around us. We are the Father's designated channels, conduits, instruments – His vessels of mercy – in bringing hope and consolation to a broken world.

This is not just "all about us." Our sufferings, and His comfort and consolation, are for a *FAR* greater and nobler purpose. They are a part of His high-calling, His heavenly-calling, His celestial-calling in our lives. They are at the center of His high-life in us.

Heed the "beside-calling." Embrace the sufferings and our Father's ever-abiding presence in them. Allow Him to live that "beside-calling" of comfort and consolation through you to a hurting humanity. Please read carefully the next two verses and embrace them:

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ.

And whether we are 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 are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation (II Corinthians 1:5-6).

COMFORT AND CONSOLATION COME FROM LOVE

... *Comfort of love* ... (Philippians 2:1).

For we have great joy and consolation in your love ... (Philemon 1:7).

This consolation that is brought to us by our Father, of which we are called to be conduits, in a word, is love. This is why Paul speaks of the "*comfort of love*" and the "*consolation in your love.*"

Indeed, what is more comforting than love? Love is the greatest of all, even of faith and hope (I Corinthians 13:13). Without it we have nothing, and are nothing (I Corinthians 13:1-3). Love is the very nature of our Father (I John 4:8, 16). Regardless of the situation or circumstance love will never fail (I Corinthians 13:8)!

Writing on Paul's exhortation of love to the Philippians, Albert Barnes wrote:

Our happiness is almost all centered in love. It is when we love a parent, a wife, a child, a sister, a neighbor, that we have the highest earthly enjoyment. It is in the love of God, of Christ, of Christians, of the souls of men, that the redeemed find their highest happiness. Hatred is a passion full of misery; love an emotion full of joy ... Paul would have that love exercised in the highest degree ...

The comfort and consolation of the Father comes from His great love for and to us. Notice how in the following divine chain-of-events love is the end result of God's working in the believer. It all starts with "*tribulations*" and it ends in the "*love of God.*"

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience; ►

and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us (Romans 5:3-5).

Notice the order of working as a result of the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts:

- ◆ tribulation works patience
- ◆ patience works experience
- ◆ experience works hope
- ◆ hope works boldness

So there we have the divine process: love-tribulation-patience-experience-hope-boldness.

Little wonder that Paul calls love,

... the bond of perfectness (Colossians 3:14).

THIS is the end result of our divine calling,

*... that we should be holy and without blame before Him **in love** (Ephesians 1:4).*

A MAN OF SORROWS

... a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

Isaiah foretold of Israel's coming Messiah. His description of Him in chapter 53 was that He was, among other things, “... a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ was acquainted with what it meant to be human – to suffer sorrows and grief. When He was here in the flesh, although King and Master of Israel, He did not live as such. Rather, He lived and conducted Himself as a humble servant.

But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant ... (Philippians 2:7).

As humanity's Servant, He experienced the same cares and sufferings of life as did those to whom He ministered. He *identified* with them in that He endured the full range of human sorrows and

suffering, for,

... Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ... (Isaiah 53:4)

What identity with broken humanity! He bore our griefs, He carried our sorrow. Truly, He was,

... Touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15).

The word translated “infirmities” here is the Greek word *astheneia*, which James Strong defines as “feebleness” (“un-firmness” – *Concordant Keyword Concordance*). He was immersed into our weakness and brokenness, so that His *poverty* might be our *enrichment*,

For we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be made rich (II Corinthians 8:9).

WHY THE BODY OF CHRIST SUFFERS

... In Christ's stead ... (II Corinthians 5:20).

Jesus Christ was a minister Who identified with those whom He served; but He is no longer here in the flesh. Rather, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. We no longer know Him “*after the flesh*” (II Corinthians 5:16). Although He is still ministering to the world today, He does it through the instrumentality of the believers, the ecclesia, who are His Body – the Body of Christ.

Now you are the Body of Christ, and members in particular (I Corinthians 12:27).

For we are members of His Body ... (Ephesians 5:30).

Even though we have a position in Christ, seated in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), and are joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), we are here as His ambassadors of grace.

For the love Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were

all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, Who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given unto us the ministry of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God. For He has made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (II Corinthians 5:14-21).

Paul had spoken in the previous chapter of his own sufferings (II Corinthians 4:8-9, 16-17). He spoke of *“the light of the glorious gospel”* which was a *“treasure in earthen vessels”* (i.e., that Christ dwells in us!). This reference to the earthen vessels reminds us of Gideon (Judges 7) and the pitchers that were broken so that the light was released. So it is with the Body of Christ: we are broken so that *“Jesus Christ may be made manifest”* in our bodies:

Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus's sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh (II Corinthians 4:10-11).

ON ASSIGNMENT

... In infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake ... (II Corinthians 12:10).

We who have trusted Christ are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20; KJV margin, Darby, Young). We are here on foreign soil – *“on assignment.”* If we were in our own country we would not be subject to any of the cares and sorrows of this life; but as ambassadors to a world that is currently at enmity

with God, we are constantly faced with the burdens of such a divine *“appointment.”*

*That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that **we are appointed thereunto** (I Thessalonians 3:3).*

We are here to take our full share in the trials under which the *“whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now”* (Romans 8:22). Each of us is part of that of which Job spoke, *“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward”* (Job 5:7). We, in identity with Christ, suffer so that others may know of His wondrous and full grace. Next to our salvation we should have as our greatest desire that God would use us as His vessels of mercy. We suffer the perils of broken humanity *for His sake.*

*As it is written, **“For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter”** (Romans 8:36).*

Each day that He extends free grace to mankind is but another day of extension to our *“tour of duty,”* but He will *“make it up to us.”*

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Galatians 6:9).

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).

As we find ourselves *“in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses **for Christ's sake**”* (II Corinthians 12:10), let's not forget that *“we are appointed thereunto”* (I Thessalonians 3:3).

Be mindful of our *honored* appointment; we are *on divine assignment!*

SUFFERING WITH HIM

... If so be that we suffer with Him ... (Romans 8:17).

As heirs of God and joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ we are destined to share in His glory and reigning; but this comes about only through our suffering “*with Him*.” It is only after our suffering together *with Christ* that we will share in His glory and reigning.

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together (Romans 8:17).

If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him ... (II Timothy 2:12).

Notice the phrase “*suffer with Him*” in Romans 8:17.

First of all, our sufferings are not solo – we do not suffer alone. As believers we do not walk our broken road unaccompanied. We “*suffer with Him*.” We are “suffering together” (CLV) with the Lord Jesus Christ. What consolation and comfort. What solace and encouragement. This understanding in itself can change the whole face of suffering; our attitude and disposition. In our sufferings we can be

changed from discouragement to encouragement; from sorrow to joy; from complaint to praise; from ungratefulness to thanksgiving and gratitude. After all, we are doing it together – “*with Him*.”

Secondly, the only suffering that meets the condition of reigning “*with Him*” (II Timothy 2:12), is suffering “*with Him*.” Wonderful truth indeed!

The simple fact is that all of mankind suffers. This is merely the lot of Adam’s descendants. What transforms *any* suffering into preparation for one to share in Christ’s glory and reigning is enduring it “*with Him*.” Doing so “*with Him*” in the spirit of patience and joy – not with complaining, murmuring and grumbling, but with gratefulness and thanksgiving – turns *any* trial, however common it may appear to be, into a timeless treasure. Read the broader context:

... If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:17-18).

(to be continued)

www.JointsandBands.com

A “*Savior of All*” Fellowship Contact BLOG

*“... All the body by **joints and bands** having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God” (Colossians 2:19).*

This is a new blog allowing you to network with other believers who rejoice in the salvation of all.

Are you looking for other believers with whom you can fellowship and study around the glorious truth that our Father is the “*Savior of all men*” (I Timothy 4:10)? If so, then this blog is for you.

We are often contacted by those who desire fellowship and study with others who have come to rejoice “*that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us the Word of reconciliation*” (II Corinthians 5:19).

This blog is not in itself designed as a place of fellowship,

but simply a place where individual believers can post their details so that they can connect for face to face fellowship and study.

If you are interested in letting others know of your desire and openness to fellowship and study with them, then:

- (1) Go to www.JointsandBands.com
- (2) Choose your state on the right-hand side.
- (3) Add a post with your name and contact information along with a brief comment about your desire for fellowship, or your invitation to join in fellowship already taking place.

Tell others that glory in God being “*All in all*” (I Corinthians 15:28) about this fellowship contact blog. Check back often for newly posted contact information to share with family and friends.