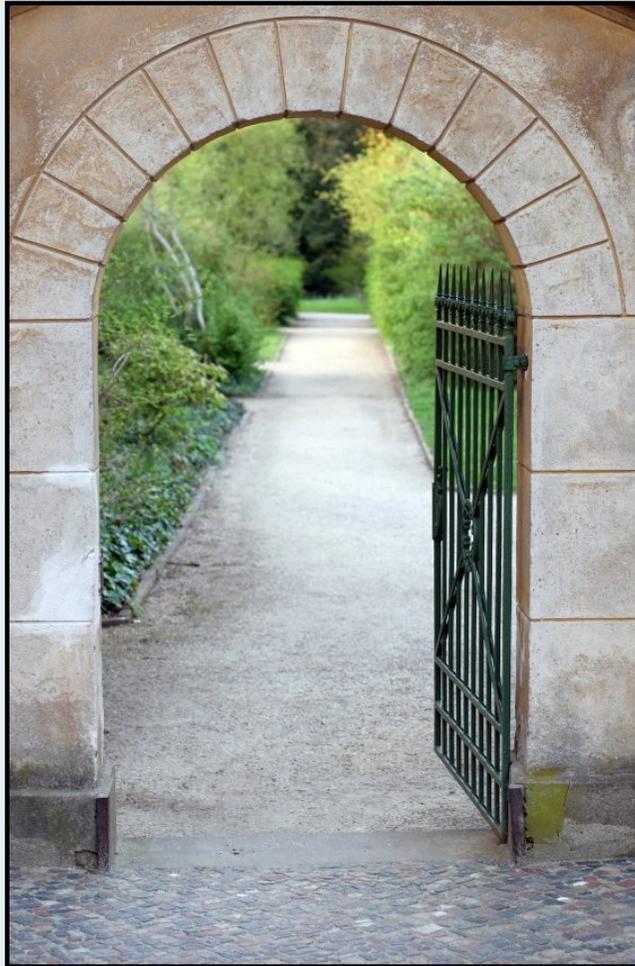


The Gate and The Way



**For the gate is small, and the way is afflicted that leads to life,
and few are those who find it.
[Matthew 7:14, Literal Translation]**

Joseph Herrin

**The Gate and
The Way**

by Joseph Herrin

The Gate and The Way

Copyright © 2011 by Joseph Herrin

Permission of the author is hereby granted for copying, printing and distributing this book to others, either in part or in whole. However, no charge may be associated with the distribution.

Heart4God Publishing

website: www.heart4god.ws

blog: <http://www.parablesblog.blogspot.com>

Chapter Index

[Foreword](#)

[What is Christ's Invitation to You?](#)

[Must a Christian be a Disciple?](#)

[Why Does God Require Christians to Suffer?](#)

[Suffering Saints](#)

[Sharers in Christ's Sufferings](#)

[We Wrestle Not Against Flesh and Blood...](#)

[The Privilege of Persecution](#)

[The Christian Life as Tragedy](#)

[The God Who Wounds](#)

[Suffering's Role in Spiritual Growth](#)

[Suffering as True Worship](#)

Foreword

A word of explanation is necessary at the start of this book. In this work you will find this writer using names in reference to God the Father and God the Son that are more faithful to their Hebrew original than the names and titles generally in use by the church today. The name Yah, or Yahweh, will be found in reference to God the Father, and the name Yahshua will be utilized when speaking of the Son.

This usage is not intended to be divisive, nor does it serve as a renunciation of the usage of titles such as Lord or God. Neither is it a condemnation of those who choose to call the Son of God Jesus. My intent as a teacher of the Bible is simply to illumine and instruct. There is great meaning in the Hebrew names of the Father and the Son, and these names are directly related to one another, as well as bearing many significant relationships to other historic figures from the Bible, some of whom serves as types and shadows of the Son of God.

For example, Joshua, the Israelite leader who led the people of God across the Jordan and into battle to take possession of the land of Canaan bears the same name as the Messiah. They both were called Yahshua. The Son of God also began His ministry at the Jordan River as He was baptized by John. Both men labored to establish a kingdom dedicated to Yahweh, the first external and natural, the latter internal and spiritual.

Yah is the name used in reference to the Father on forty-nine separate occasions in the Old Testament. Most Christians have utilized this name of God without knowing that they were doing so. Whenever the word hallelujah is uttered, the speaker is literally exclaiming "Praise Yah," for this is the meaning of the Hebrew word from which it is derived. The longer name Yahweh is found an additional 6,828 times.

The name of the Son is likewise significant, for Yahshua is understood to mean "Yah's Salvation." The Gospel writer indicates that this is the meaning of the name given to the Savior at His birth.

Matthew 1:21

"And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Yahshua, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."

It has been the practice of this writer for many years to use these names, which more clearly represent their Hebrew originals. It is my hope that their employment in this book might aid the reader by bringing forth light on relationships that are obscured, as well as promoting an increased intimacy with God the Father by calling Him by His memorial name, instead of a title which men have substituted.



What Is Christ's Invitation to You?

Matthew 16:24

Then Yahshua said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

The church today has a decidedly un-Biblical view of what Christ's invitation is to mankind. This is revealed in the common question that one Christian asks of another, "When were you saved?" The church teaches that a person receives salvation by believing and confessing certain things about Jesus Christ/Yahshua the Messiah. A method of witnessing called "The Roman Road" is frequently employed in which key verses from Paul's letter to the saints in Rome are quoted. For example:

Romans 10:9-10

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

These words appear to sum up the matter of salvation in Christ pretty handily. Believe, and confess. Confession results in salvation! Case closed. The church is satisfied. Ministers assure the members of their congregations that if they have said the sinner's prayer, confessed Christ (and been dunked in the church's baptismal pool), they are saved and nothing more is required.

There is a great deal within the heart of man that would make this cheap view of salvation very appealing. Mankind does not like to suffer. The soul of man seeks out teachings that assure it of salvation with a minimum of inconvenience, and personal cost. The church, which has never been more sensual and fleshly than it is at this hour, has focused entirely upon a few verses that speak nothing of a surrendered life and suffering, while ignoring the myriad of passages that do.

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...

I Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

There is a tendency of human nature to always seek out an easy path. God has provided a path to life, but it is not an easy one. The path begins with a narrow gate. It is the narrow gate that Paul has described in Romans 10:9-10. Christ is the entry point into salvation. You can find The Way to life through no other entrance.

John 10:7-9

So Yahshua said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”

Again, the statement “he will be saved” sounds like a *fait accompli*, a complete and finished act. Yet, these words are not the entire testimony of Christ, or of the apostle Paul. There is much, much more. One enters by the gate, but then they must walk the path that leads to life. Salvation is not fully assured unless one does both.

Matthew 24:13

“But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

Hebrews 10:39

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Is not salvation the promise of preserving our soul? If we would obtain this salvation, we must not only believe and confess Christ, but we must yield our lives wholly to follow Him wherever He would lead. Every one of the gospel writers included this truth in their testimonies of Christ.

Matthew 16:24

Then Yahshua said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and ***follow Me.***”

Matthew 19:21

Yahshua said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, ***follow Me.***”

Mark 8:34-35

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and ***follow Me.*** For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.”

Luke 9:23

And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and ***follow Me.***”

John 10:27-28

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they ***follow Me***; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

John 12:26

“If anyone serves Me, he must ***follow Me...***”

The majority of those in the church today do not want to know the whole counsel of God. They are content to receive myths and fables, and to have ministers who will tickle their ears and tell them the things they want to hear. The soul of man does not want to hear that they must lose their life to find life. It does not want to hear that there is a cross for every follower of Christ to bear. No, the soul of man wants to hear a message of no-cost salvation.

From the gospels at the beginning of the New Testament, to the book of Revelation at the end, the Holy Spirit inspired men to proclaim a costly salvation. Those who would be saved must “follow” Christ, not just confess Him. Speaking of the overcomers in Christ who stand with the Savior upon Mount Zion, John records:

Revelation 14:4

These are the ones *who follow the Lamb* wherever He goes.

The church has focused exclusively on Christ being the gate, while avoiding the fact that there is also a path to be trod. One cannot arrive at life unless they enter through the narrow gate, **AND** follow Christ down the afflicted path.

Matthew 7:13-14

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For *the gate* is small, and *the way* is afflicted that leads to life, and few are those who find it.”

Christ’s invitation to mankind is to believe on Him, **AND** to follow Him. The church today proclaims the first part, while leaving off the latter. Why? Because it is in surrendering one’s life to follow Christ that the cost is borne.

In America, and most of the Western world, it costs very little, or nothing at all, to confess faith in Christ. Although America is one of the most wicked nations to have ever existed, filled with depravity and violence, focused on the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification, she has pretended to be a “Christian nation.” A person is not persecuted in America simply for professing to be a Christian anymore than they are persecuted for professing to be a Democrat, or a Republican. Yet, let a man or woman begin to be led of the Spirit in all that they do and they will find themselves greatly opposed. Nor will it be secular society, or government alone that opposes them. The chief persecution always arises from those religious followers of God who refuse themselves to take up their cross and follow Christ.

John 16:2-3

“They will make you outcasts from the synagogue (churches), but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.”

People of God, the testimony of the Spirit and the Word is that there is more required to obtain salvation than to believe and confess things about Christ. If you would obtain to eternal life, you must surrender all and take up your cross and follow Christ.

Christ enumerated those things all disciples must count as loss in order to obtain life.

Luke 14:33

“So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.”

Luke 14:26-27

"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Mark 10:29-30

Yahshua said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.”

If you commit to “follow” Christ, you will find that there is a great cost in doing so. Christ never sought to hide this cost from those who approached Him.

Luke 9:57-62

As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, "I will **follow You** wherever You go." And Yahshua said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And He said to another, "**Follow Me.**" But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But He said to him, "Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." Another also said, "I will **follow You**, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Yahshua said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Is it not evident in each of these encounters that the cost arose when the issue was **following** Christ? Let us be very practical and define what it is to follow Christ. How did the disciples of Christ follow Him when He was accomplishing His earthly ministry? Did they not hear His voice and do whatever He commanded them to do? Christian discipleship always begins with an initial invitation.

Matthew 4:18-22

Now as Yahshua was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "**Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and **followed Him**. Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and **followed Him**.

Matthew 9:9

As Yahshua went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "**Follow Me!**" And he got up and **followed Him**.

We find this pattern repeated over and over again. Christ appears to a man and invites him to follow Him. Each man was challenged to lay aside everything pertaining to their former life, a life that had been lived at the direction of their own soul, and to take Christ as their leader and guide. Rather than continuing with a self-directed life, they had to embrace a Christ-directed life. This pattern still holds true to this day.

Romans 8:14

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Although Christ has ascended to the Father, He has not left us without guidance. Indeed, Yahshua testified that it was much better that He ascend to the Father, for then He could send forth the Spirit to indwell the hearts of His disciples. The Spirit of Christ within would guide each individual to know the specific will of God for their life.

John 16:7

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."

I Corinthians 2:10-12

The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God...

Christ has sent His Spirit into the world to reveal the thoughts of God to mankind. Christ was led of the Spirit in all things. He stands as the pattern for everyone who would follow after Him. The Father showed the Son all things He desired for Him to do, and the Son was careful to do those things in the same way He saw the Father doing them.

John 5:19-20

Therefore Yahshua answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing..."

This is what it means to "follow Christ." This is the invitation Christ has always given to men and women. He is not inviting you and I to merely believe and confess certain things about Him. He is inviting us to enter into a Spirit led life where we do nothing of our own initiative. He is entreating all who would be His disciples to walk as He walked.

Let us be very pointed now, and ask the question, "Am I truly following Christ, or am I falling short of the invitation of Christ?" What is the source of direction for your life? We previously read the words of Christ where He declared, "No one can be My disciple unless

he hates... even his own life.” The Greek word rendered as “life” in our English translations is “psuche.” This word means “soul.” Christ is saying that a man must hate his own soul to walk as His disciple. What does this mean?

The soul is the seat of the mind, will and emotions. All that pertains to a person’s dreams, desires, and plans for their life reside in the soul. To be Christ’s disciple, a man or woman must lay aside their dreams, desires, and plans for their life and they must embrace the life God has chosen for them. In essence, they must hate their own soul. They must deny what they would choose for themselves, and embrace what the Father would choose for them.

John 4:34

Yahshua said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”

John 6:38

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

A disciple must become like his Master. Seeing that Christ did not live to please Himself, neither must His disciples. Seeing that Yahshua was not directed by His own soul, neither must His disciples be directed by their own souls. ALL must surrender their life if at the end of the journey they would receive life eternal.

Matthew 16:25

“For whoever wishes to save his life (psuche - soul) will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Using the illustration Christ gave about salvation being a narrow gate to be entered, and an afflicted path to be walked, we have to conclude that the church for the most part has entered in through this narrow gate, but have not found the path that leads to life. Christ declared that there would be “few” who “find” the path. Implied in this word “find” is not only the act of discovering The Way that leads to life, but also walking it to the end.

Christ never gave any other invitation aside from the invitation to be His disciple. I have found that there are Christians today who think Christ gave two invitations. One was to be a *disciple*, and this required taking up the cross and living a life of complete surrender. The other invitation was to be a *believer* in Christ. People of God, this is great error. The folly of it will be seen on that day when all must give an account of their lives.

A profound parable occurred last year as I was traveling around the country. At two locations at which I spoke, both of which were in people’s homes, the hosts’ dog got sick and threw up on the floor. On both occasions this occurred at a moment in my presentation when I knew that what I was sharing was difficult, and some present were unable to receive the message. At the latter home, this occurred as the man who owned the house was arguing that it was not necessary to be a disciple to be saved. He suggested that one could be a believer, but not a disciple, while still being assured of salvation. At that moment his dog threw up on the carpet.

Randy, the brother I was traveling with, and I both looked at one another. We discerned the parable immediately. The beast nature that Adamic man is enslaved to

struggles to receive the message of the cross. If the beast nature is ruling in a man's life, then he will vomit back up the teaching of the cross. He is unable to receive it.

There is much which is offensive in the message of the cross. If you have truly understood Christ's invitation, then you too will struggle to receive it. Does not Christ always link taking up the cross to His invitation to follow Him? Only by crucifying the flesh is any man or woman able to follow in His footsteps.

I Peter 2:21

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...

Is this the invitation you have heard and accepted? Or have you been told by man that you need only to believe in Christ and confess Him? At this hour Christ is inviting men and women to "follow" Him. Will you follow? Will you surrender your life to go wherever He leads, and to do whatever He asks of you? Yahshua has no lesser invitation. There is no other path that leads to life.



Must a Christian be a Disciple?

I believe the early apostles would be quite amazed to find that the teachings of Christ have been so altered in the centuries since the church was birthed that the terms *Christian* and *disciple* have been divorced from one another. A false mindset has been propagated throughout Christendom. People are told that Christ came to die for their sins and that they need to believe and confess their faith in His atoning work. Yet, any mention of committing to a new paradigm where Christ directs the course of one's life is omitted, or left for a later time. If the call to discipleship is ever brought up, it is often presented as optional.

As the previous chapter declared, Christ only gave one invitation. He invited men and women to be His disciples by taking up THEIR cross and following Him. He presented no second option where a person could confess Him, but remain in a self-directed life. Indeed, Yahshua reproached people for acting hypocritically by calling Him "Lord" when they were not living to do His will and pleasure.

Luke 6:46

"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Yahshua did not actually repeat the word translated as "Lord" twice as it is recorded above. In the Greek language in which the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament exist, a word is repeated to denote emphasis. Repeating a word was the equivalent of putting an exclamation point after it, or putting it in bold type. Christ was saying, "Why do you call me '**LORD!**' and do not do what I say?"

This question, posed by Christ, has at no time been more appropriately asked than at present. Multitudes of people have been introduced to Christian belief apart from any emphasis on the need to adopt Christ as the Head and Ruler of their life. These same ones accept Yahshua as Savior, eagerly embracing His atoning work on the cross of Calvary, but placing their lives wholly at Christ's disposal to be lived as He would choose is omitted.

One of the plainest Biblical witnesses of Christ's call to *discipleship* is found in His last words to His followers before He ascended into heaven. It is in that passage that is referred to as "The Great Commission."

Matthew 28:18-20

And Yahshua came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The Great Commission spoken by Yahshua was not to "go and make Christians," nor to "make confessors." The commission was to "make disciples." We need not wrangle over what is implied in the use of the word "disciple," for Christ clearly defined what He intended by the use of this word.

Matthew 10:24-25

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the

disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master.”

Yahshua reveals that the goal of a disciple is “that he become like his teacher.” He also links the relationship between a disciple and his teacher to that of a servant (or slave) with his master. There is a very defined authority structure. A slave must obey his master. A slave lives to do the will and pleasure of the one to whom he belongs. Even as slaves existed in the Roman Empire, and were bought and became the property of their masters, so too has Christ purchased all those who come to Him for salvation.

I Corinthians 6:19-20

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that ***you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price...***

Acts 20:28

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd ***the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.***

II Peter 2:1

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying ***the Master who bought them...***

Revelation 5:9

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for ***You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.***”

This truth of men being “***purchased***” by Christ is proclaimed extensively throughout the New Testament. Christians are not merely people joining a club, nor are they acolytes who embrace a particular form of belief or teaching. The entrance into the Kingdom of God is only through the blood of Christ. All who enter through His blood become the property of Christ, being bought with an exceedingly high price.

I Peter 1:18-19

Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

That all who receive salvation in Christ must become Yahshua’s servants is not unjust. Christ has taken men and women who were dead in their sins, and He has made them alive. This transfer from death unto life came at an exceptionally high price. Christ accepted death that He might give life to others. Is it not just that He would require all those who receive *His life* to surrender that life to be lived as He directs? After all, the life we have in Christ is not our own. Apart from receiving Christ’s life, we would be spiritually dead and separated from the kingdom of God. We would be lost and condemned in our trespasses

and sin.

Consider how the church has cheapened this great gift that the Son of God has given to mankind. The church wants to be made alive in Christ, but they do not want to give *their lives* to Christ. They want salvation without sacrifice. The church wants the riches that are found only in Yahshua the Messiah, but they do not want to live the same life of devotion to the will and pleasure of the Father that He lived. The vast majority of Christians today wish to remain living the life of their own choosing, a self-focused pursuit of personal fulfillment and pleasure, while adding the benefits of Christ to their goody basket. Christ never offered salvation on these terms.

Matthew 16:25-26

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Yahweh has given us many ways to visualize the salvation He has provided to mankind. The grandest similitude found anywhere in Scripture is in the epic history of Yahweh delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt. In this event we see both the atoning work of Christ in the blood of the Passover lamb placed on the doors of the homes of those dwelling in Goshen, and we also see the IMMEDIATE call to FOLLOW wherever God would lead.

Exodus 12:11

“Now you shall eat [the Passover meal] in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste - it is Yahweh’s Passover.”

The events of this first Passover Feast serve as a type and shadow of those things to be fulfilled in Christ.

Colossians 2:16-17

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to ***food or drink*** or in respect to a ***festival*** or a new moon or a Sabbath day - ***things which are a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.***

I Corinthians 5:7

For Christ, our Passover, also has been sacrificed...

As the Israelites ate that first Passover meal 1,500 years prior to the birth of Christ, they were acting out in type the salvation that Yahweh would one day provide for all mankind. Yahweh would send forth His Son as the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed that man might be “passed over” by death. The Lamb of God would be slain that mankind might live.

God instructed the Israelites to take a year old male lamb without spot or blemish, and to bring it into their homes. The lamb was to dwell with them for four days, and afterward it was to be slain and the blood put on the doorposts and lintel of the home. The death angel was to visit Egypt that same night. Wherever he saw the blood on the door he would pass over and no one inside would die. In every house where there was no blood, the firstborn

males would die.

This aspect of salvation has been embraced by the church today. The church proclaims the death of Christ as a substitution for mankind. The Son of God died that men might live before God. Yet, this is not all that occurred on that first Passover. There was much more.

The Israelites were instructed to not only place the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorways, they were also commanded to eat the lamb and be ready to travel.

Exodus 12:8-11

“They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste - it is Yahweh’s Passover.”

What do these things symbolize? The unleavened bread and bitter herbs, along with the Passover Lamb, were all types and shadows of Christ. The unleavened bread represents Christ’s sinless life. The bitter herbs symbolize that the life of Christ was very difficult. He was “a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). In eating each of these things, the Israelites were acting out annually the coming salvation of God. Not only would Christ’s blood pay the penalty for the sin of mankind, but Christ would send forth His Spirit to produce life inside of every man, woman and child who became a partaker of His salvation. Eating the Passover meal is symbolic of receiving the life of Christ into our bodies.

A great error in the church today is in thinking that Christ suffered so that they will not have to suffer. That this is profound error is revealed repeatedly in Christ’s invitation to men and women to “take up YOUR CROSS and follow Me.” Christ had a cross to bear, and so too do all who would come to Him for salvation. As the Israelites ate the bitter herbs, they were giving testimony to this bitter aspect of our union with Christ. Even as we become partakers of Christ’s life, we also become partakers of His suffering.

II Corinthians 4:7-10

But we have this treasure [the life of Christ] in earthen vessels [our bodies], so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Yahshua, so that the life of Yahshua also may be manifested in our body.

Although Paul wrote these words in the context of the experience of those who are apostles and ministers, the Bible reveals that this is the common experience of all who are members of the body of Christ.

I Peter 2:21

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...

The church today is very willing to accept the life of Christ inside them as they are born a second time of the Spirit of God, but they do not want to embrace the sufferings of Christ. However, apart from sharing in Yahshua's suffering, no man can be perfected. It is those experiences that afflict our natural life that are the instruments the Father uses to bring forth a spiritual creation within.

I Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

We enter into these experiences of suffering in the same way that Yahshua did. We yield our lives to be directed by the Holy Spirit. This aspect of salvation is foreshadowed in Yahweh's instructions to Moses to command the people to eat the Passover meal "with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand." Those who become partakers of the life of Christ, who are delivered from death into life, are to immediately be ready to depart their old life and yield themselves to go wherever the Spirit of Christ would lead them, and to do whatever Yahweh would ask of them.

Mark 8:34

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

There is a tremendous consistency throughout the entire testimony of the Bible. Both Old and New Testaments reveal the two-fold aspect of salvation. Salvation is established through both *faith* and *obedience*. Not only must the Christian believe in the Son of God as the "Savior," he must also surrender to follow Him as "Lord."

Luke 2:11

For today in the city of David there has been born for you a **Savior**, who is Christ the **Lord**.

Although it is common among Christians today to speak of the Son of God as their "Lord," there are few who actually have embraced Yahshua as the Lord of their life. On that day when we must all give an account, Yahweh will judge all men with impartiality. Those who have surrendered their lives to live to do His will and pleasure will be afforded entrance into His kingdom. Those who have lived life at the direction of their own soul, while paying lip service to the lordship of Christ will be denied entrance into the kingdom.

Matthew 7:21

"Not everyone who says to Me, '**LORD!**' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

This aspect of entering into our inheritance in Christ was also very plainly foreshadowed in the history and experiences of Israel. After partaking of the first Passover, the entire nation of Israel departed Egypt. At that time Yahweh did a remarkable thing. He gave them the pillar of fire and cloud to always dwell with them, and to serve as a guide in their travels. The pillar of fire and cloud stand as a type and shadow of the Holy Spirit

whom Christ has sent forth as a guide for all those who have become partakers of His life.

Romans 8:14

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Galatians 5:25

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:18

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Immediately after Yahshua was baptized in the Jordan River, the Spirit of God descended upon Him and remained. At once, the Spirit began to lead and direct every action of the Son of God.

Mark 1:10-12

Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.

This immediacy of being led of the Spirit is brought forth in Yahweh's command for the children of Israel to eat the Passover meal fully girded and ready to travel. Tragically, this aspect of life in Christ is absent from the proclamation of the gospel today. If we were to re-write the history of Israel according to the experience of a large segment of the church today, we would have them lounging at ease in their homes, eating the Passover Lamb without the inclusion of bitter herbs. They would then remain in Goshen, continuing to eat from the fleshpots of Egypt and pursuing intercourse in the ways of a fallen world system. The tragic result is that Christians remain in bondage to sin and selfish living, rather than attaining conformity to the image of Christ.

The desire of God for all who are in Christ Jesus/Yahshua the Messiah is that, when they become partakers of His life, they at once yield all their remaining days to be lived at His direction and pleasure. We must depart from life in Egypt, which stands as a symbol of the world, and embrace a new paradigm where we accept suffering and reproaches that we might be transformed into the same image as the Savior of mankind.

Hebrews 13:12-13

Therefore Yahshua also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

Understand then, that the invitation of Christ has never been anything less than discipleship. His invitation is "Come. Take up your cross, and follow Me."



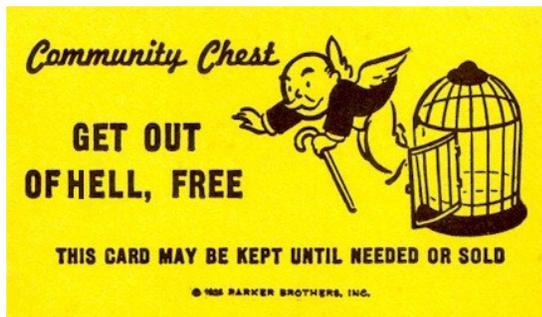
Why Does God Require Christians to Suffer?

The inescapable message proclaimed by Christ and His apostles is that Yahweh has appointed unto men that they suffer many things in this life. This truth is affirmed through the most common image associated with Christianity; the cross. The cross is an instrument of suffering, leading to the death of the individual.

As has been demonstrated in the previous two chapters, Christ gave forth only one form of invitation. He invited men and women to “Come, take up your cross, and follow Me.” For those living in that hour when Rome used crucifixion as a form of capital punishment, it was clearly understood that what Christ was announcing was a call to embrace suffering.

The question arises, “Why does Yahweh require all who would follow Christ to experience suffering? What is the reason behind it?” The answer is found as we define the salvation that Christ provides for mankind.

I think the most common concept of salvation today is that Christ came to deliver men from the suffering of hell. Many Christians equate salvation with an escape from eternal torment. To them, being saved is the equivalent of receiving a “Get-Out-Of-Hell-Free-Card.”



I do not deny that being delivered from the Lake of Fire, which is also called “The Second Death” (Revelation 20:14, 21:8), is a component of the salvation Christ has provided to mankind, but it does not come near to defining the true nature of salvation. Other aspects of the salvation of Christ are revealed in the following Scriptures.

I John 3:8-9

The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

I John 3:5-6

You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

Luke 4:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Christ came to set men free from their bondage to sin. In the last chapter we looked at the parable contained in the nation of Israel being brought forth from a life of slavery and harsh servitude in Egypt. This stands as a type and shadow of the bondage all men experience. All who are born of the first Adam enter this world as slaves to sin. Like Pharaoh, sin rules with an iron hand over the lives of mankind and refuses to let them go. Unless God had sent a Savior, all men would remain in bondage to sin today. Christ came to set the captives free.

In his epistle to Rome, the apostle Paul describes this bondage of the natural man to sin.

Romans 7:14-25

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate... So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God! He has, through Yahshua Christ our Lord!

The salvation Christ has provided for men is primarily focused on delivering mankind from the sin's rule over their lives. Prior to the appearing of Christ, no man had ever been able to break free from the shackles of sin. King David was described by Yahweh as "a man after My own heart," but he sinned grievously, committing both adultery and murder. What a powerful hold this tyrant sin has over the lives of men! The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

When Yahweh sent Moses to lead His people out from bondage in Egypt, Moses repeatedly entreated Pharaoh to let the people of God go. Pharaoh adamantly refused. Even when Yahweh struck Egypt with many plagues, Pharaoh remained intractable. He would not permit God's chosen people to depart from his rule. So too do we see sin refusing to release mankind from its steel grip. No amount of entreaty will persuade sin to free men born under this bondage.

It was only after the blood of the Passover lamb was placed on the doors of the homes of Yahweh's people that they were released. There is a profound message to be understood in this. Yahweh had told Adam that if he transgressed against His will by eating of the fruit forbidden to him, he would surely die. The Scriptures tell us that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and "the soul that sins must die" (Ezekiel 18:4). This is an inescapable law.

Pharaoh stands as a symbol of the power of sin over the lives of men. Men have entered into bondage because they have sold themselves to sin. Our forefather Adam sealed the fate of all of his descendants when he sinned in the Garden of Eden. We were all "in Adam" when he sinned, and consequently we were all made sinners, and all became subject to death.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...

Mankind, in Adam, became subject to the law of sin and death. Pharaoh stands as a type of the mastery of sin over mankind. Pharaoh would not let his captives go free. He demanded that they spend their lives in service to him, and that they die in his presence. Yahweh, however, made a way for mankind to be set free.

Death, being a consequence of sin, could not be denied. The fact remains that “the wages of sin is death.” Yet, Yahweh would permit the soul of one creature to serve as a substitution for the soul of another. In the Old Testament we see this in the substitutionary sacrifices that Moses delivered to the children of Israel. A bull, an ox, a sheep or goat, or a bird could be sacrificed that the sin of man might be passed over. These animals had to be slain. Their blood had to be poured out, for the Scriptures teach that “the soul is in the blood.” Yahweh would accept the soul of these animals in exchange for the souls of men and women. These animals died that man might live.

Understand now, why Israel could not be released from bondage in Egypt until after the blood of the Passover lamb had been shed and placed on their doorways. The only escape from the bondage of sin is through death. The Israelites could either die for their sins, or someone else could die in their place. The penalty of sin must be met.

Pharaoh released the people of God the night of that first Passover, for their lives had slipped out of his control. The Passover lamb had died for them, even as Christ has died for us. His death became our death. Having died with Christ, sin (Pharaoh) no longer has any control over us. The penalty of death had been paid. By becoming partakers of the resurrection life of Christ the people of God are freed from sin’s bondage. This is the salvation Christ purchased for mankind.

You may say, “This is all well and fine, and I agree with it, but why must I then suffer? If the power of sin has been broken over my life, why must I also carry a cross? Was not the cross of Christ sufficient?” These are excellent questions, and they deserve an answer.

We become one with Christ by faith as we believe in His atoning work. When He died, we died. When He rose again from the dead, we were raised to newness of life with Him (Romans 6). All of this is symbolized in the ordinance of baptism. When we are placed under the water, our union with Christ in His death is portrayed. When we are lifted back out of the water, our union with Christ in His resurrection is depicted. Even as a person being brought out of the water will take into his/her lungs a breath of air, so too do all who are in Christ receive into their beings the Holy Spirit that they might have the divine life of Christ inside of them.

In Christ, men and women become new creatures. There is life where there was formerly death. A spiritual being has been conceived, and from the moment that we receive the seed of Christ into our beings it begins to grow, mature, and advance in conformity to the image of the Son of God. Yahweh desires that this process continue until Christ be fully formed in us and we attain to the fulness of the stature that belongs to Yahshua (Ephesians 4:13).

At the same time that a new spiritual creature is growing and advancing in us, the flesh has to be stripped away. Our physical bodies remain with us, and they still remain under the curse of sin. This is obvious, for death continues to work in our natural bodies.

They are all decaying and growing old. What Paul declared in Romans chapter 7 continues to hold true. "In my flesh dwells no good thing. Sin dwells in my flesh."

It is given to those who are born again of the Spirit of Christ to do two things. They must mature spiritually, and they must put the flesh to death. Only by putting the flesh to death can a new creation arise and be manifested before the eyes of God and all creation. This process of the life of Christ arising to maturity within us, while at the same time our old Adamic life is being reduced to nothing, is summed up in the following statement of John the Baptist.

John 3:30

"He must increase, but I must decrease."

The apostle Paul expresses this two-fold process in the following manner.

Galatians 5:24-25

Now those who belong to Christ Yahshua have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Christians are called to live by, and walk in, the Spirit, and they must crucify the flesh. This is where the cross enters into the lives of those who are disciples of Christ.

It would be difficult for any Christian to determine for themselves the best way to accomplish this two-fold goal. We are often blinded to the presence of sin in our lives, and we cannot kill what we cannot perceive. Nor, do we know the best manner in which to promote the advancement of Christ's life within our beings.

Suppose God would ask you at the beginning of your life in Christ to design a path through your coming days that would promote spiritual growth and lead to the death of the flesh. Do you have the wisdom and understanding to design such a course? Of course not. None of us do. This is why God never asks such a thing from His children. Yahweh alone knows what experiences and circumstances will provide the optimum environment for our growth as sons of God. Therefore, He requires that all who come to Christ be prepared to surrender their lives to be led of His Spirit wherever He would direct. The invitation of Christ is "Come, take up your cross, and follow Me."

Yahweh sees with perfect sight those things in our life that need to be put to death, and He also understands how to best promote spiritual growth. As we yield our lives to be led of His Spirit we will find Him ordering our lives so that we encounter those circumstances, trials, and provocations that will expose the sin in our flesh, while providing opportunities for the spirit man to rise up and put the flesh to death.

If you perceive the goal of salvation, to deliver men from sin's rule over their lives, then you can understand the necessity of God leading all Christians down an afflicted path. Although Christ has purchased this deliverance from sin's bondage, it must yet be manifested in our lives. There is a difference between being offered a gift and making it your own possession. Christ has redeemed us from sin's dominion, but we must arise and engage in spiritual warfare in order to put every enemy under our feet. He has promised us that no enemy will ever be able to stand against us, whether it be fear, or lust, or anger, or covetousness, or pride, or any other thing. However, it is required of us that we take the victory Christ has gained for us and apply it to our lives.

The apostle Paul explained the purpose of afflictions and suffering in the lives of the

saints. He stated that Christians are constantly delivered over to experiences of death to the natural Adamic life that the life of Yahshua can be displayed in us.

II Corinthians 4:8-11

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Yahshua, so that the life of Yahshua also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Yahshua's sake, so that the life of Yahshua also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

If mankind is left to determine his own path through life, he will invariably choose a way other than that which God has determined for him. Most Christians choose an easy path, avoiding trials, suffering, loss, and persecution wherever possible. The entire body of teaching known as "the prosperity gospel" has arisen from the soul of man as it seeks comfort, abundance and pleasure above all else. Although such a doctrine is highly appealing to the soul of man, it will lead no one to maturity in Christ. The path that leads to life is afflicted, not one of uninterrupted comfort and blessing.

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is afflicted that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

As I look back on the past 12 years of my life, after having yielded to follow Christ wherever He would lead, I observe an afflicted path. There is no better way to describe it. Yet, it has also been a path of tremendous grace. The Lord of life has walked with me the entire way. I am confident He will continue to do so. Like Paul, I want to finish my course with joy, knowing that there is a reward awaiting that is so far surpassing any of these "momentary, light afflictions" as to be beyond comparison.

People of God, if you do not accept the invitation of Christ to "Come, take up your cross, and follow Me," you will never arrive at the glorious inheritance that awaits those who walk as overcomers. Can we not embrace momentary afflictions now to receive a far surpassing inheritance in Christ? As the apostle Peter put it, Yahweh has determined that we suffer "for a little while," but the end He has in mind for His sons and daughters is glorious.

I Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now **for a little while**, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yahshua Christ...

I Peter 5:10

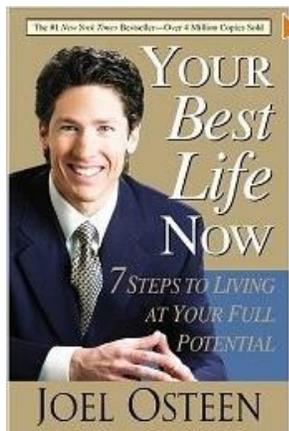
After you have suffered **for a little while**, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

The past twelve years now seem to have been but a moment. When all is said and done, I too will confess that I suffered only “for a little while.” Christ is calling many more of His sons and daughters to yield their lives to follow Him in this hour. Yahshua is a compassionate Shepherd. He knows our weaknesses, and He is of very tender mercies. He does not desire that any should fall short of the high calling set before them. He is inviting many at this hour to become His disciples. Will you heed the call?



Suffering Saints

There is a great deception that Satan has foisted upon multitudes of Christians who are eager to accept it. The foundation of this deception is the belief that God wants Christians to have happy, materially abundant, pleasurable lives free of poverty, poor health, sorrow, or persecution. If someone were to write a book to promote this false doctrine they might name it “*Your Best Life Now*.”

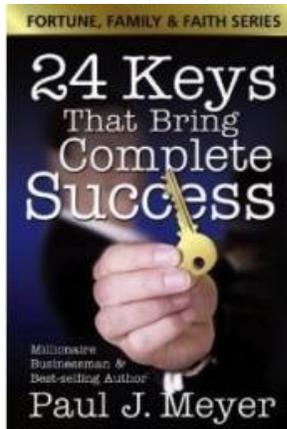


Such a book would be bound to be a best seller, for it would proclaim the things the soul of man wants to hear. It would tell Christians that God wants them to be healthy, happy, and materially prosperous; to experience success and fulfillment of their soul’s deepest desires while in this world, with an expectation of entering into the reward and blessing of God when they die. We should not be surprised that ministers who proclaim this **anti-cross** message are widely embraced, that they sell millions of books, and speak in arenas that seat tens of thousands. The apostle Paul testified that the last days before the return of Christ would be precisely as we see them today.

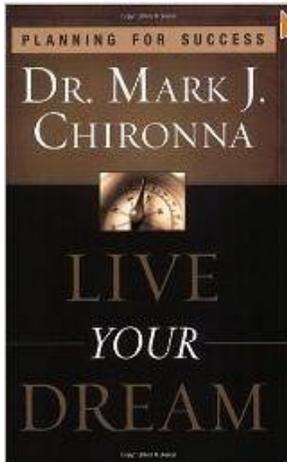
II Timothy 4:3-5

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but *according to their own desires*, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Notice the highlighted words, “*according to their own desires*.” What do men and women desire? Do they not desire to live materially prosperous lives, to be comfortable and at ease? An honest review of the most popular Christian books and teachings today will reveal that the church has indeed “heaped up for themselves teachers” to tell them the things they want to hear.



The image of the successful Christian has become so inculcated into the modern religious mind by hordes of teachers, preachers, books, and sermons that the majority are unable to any longer perceive that what is being proclaimed is the opposite of the example and message of Christ and His disciples.



Emphasis on “YOUR”

Matthew 16:24-27

Then Yahshua said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

Consider what Christ is testifying here. When the Son of Man comes in His glory, He will reward every many according to his work. Just before stating this, Yahshua describes two very contrasting lifestyles. There is the man who denies his soul, refusing to live for personal satisfaction, who takes up his cross, and follows in the footsteps of Christ. This man will receive glory and honor and life when Christ appears.

Then there is another lifestyle presented. This is the man who seeks after the world

and the things in it. Self-fulfillment, rather than self-denial, is the overriding motive of this man's life. He seeks to gain those things his soul desires, whether they be material possessions, a comfortable life, many pleasures, or the approval and applause of other men. This person may convince themselves that a pursuit of their soul's desires is the will of God, but when they stand before Christ they will find that they have forfeited the salvation of their soul.

A great many voices are proclaiming the message of the **anti-cross** today. I understand the appeal of the prosperity and self-fulfillment message. Nobody likes to suffer. If we were given the choice between spending a day enjoying ourselves, or a day suffering, and were promised that the reward at the end of the day would be the same for both, who in their right mind would choose suffering?

This is precisely where the deception comes in. The reward at the end of the day is NOT the same for the ones who choose to please themselves and the ones who embrace suffering in order to follow Christ.

Luke 13:23-30

And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able... And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

Have you ever seen a popular speaker today who gathered tens of thousands of followers by telling them that they are blessed to have less of the world's goods than others, even to be considered poor, to have little to eat, to live a painful life of sorrow and tears, and to be hated by others? Such messages do not attract the materially covetous, or those who are prospering in this world system. Megachurches would be emptied overnight if those carnal saints who fill them were suddenly subjected to the message that Christ proclaimed.

Luke 6:20-26

And turning His gaze on His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets."

The heaped up teachers of prosperity have no shortage of admirers who love the message of living a full and satisfied life. It has not occurred to most that this was not the message, or the example, of Christ and His disciples. The message of fulness and pleasure appeals to the soul, but it leads to destruction.

A great many Christians today are afraid to take a closer look at what Christ actually taught and exemplified in His life. It is imperative that they do so, however, for at the end of the day it will matter greatly which principle one lived their life by. Christ will ask, "Did you take up your cross and follow Me, or did you seek to save your natural life and satisfy

the desires of your own soul?”

One path is afflicted, leads to life, and “few there be that find it.” The other is a broad way. It is crowded with pilgrims who assure one another that it is a good and pleasant way. Notwithstanding the repeated promises of the myriad of preachers along this great highway, its end is destruction and woe.

Jeremiah 5:31

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! ***But what will you do at the end of it?***

My goal in this chapter is to point out a very important consequence that arises from the mindset we have adopted. The man who has an expectation of being called to suffer will be much more accepting, and less likely to complain, when he encounters trials and difficulties. The man who believes the best path is one of blessing, satisfaction and comfort will find much to complain about, even finding fault with God, when his experiences fall short of his soul’s desires.

Last week while riding my motorcycle I was struck by an elderly lady in her 90s. This resulted in a serious injury to my left leg. I received a compound fracture, and my ankle was dislocated. Surgery was required and steel plates and screws were put in my left leg.

Although I have had much grace from God, there is some pain and discomfort associated with such an injury. I was in the hospital two days and then sent home. My daughter Kristin invited me to stay with her, as I was instructed to keep the leg elevated and not put any weight on it for two weeks. The evening my daughter brought me home it was a bit warm in the home, but we opened the windows, as it was evening, and it cooled off adequately.

The next day was Friday and my daughter had to go to work. She left the air conditioner on for me, but the house grew warmer and warmer throughout the day. We live in Georgia and even though it is September the temperature reached the low 90s. I was in a considerable amount of discomfort from my injury. In addition to this, I began getting hotter and was sweating lying in the bed. When my daughter came home she realized at once that the A.C. wasn’t working. She called her landlord, but was told it would be Monday before a repairman could be sent out.

The week-end continued hot, and in addition to the pain and heat I had some encounters through e-mail and other venues in which some Christians were acting, or speaking, in ways that tempted me to be short, or cross with them.

Have you ever been “hot and bothered?” In such times it is very easy for a person to speak or act in a manner unbecoming the nature and Spirit of Christ. Perhaps we might be tempted to complain against God, knowing that He could make our circumstances much easier and pleasant. When encountering some provocation from another human, we may be inclined to speak impatiently, without the gentleness, the self-control, longsuffering, humility and peace that Yahweh would have us to manifest.

During the three days at home following the accident when I did not have air conditioning, the Spirit led me to contemplate these things. I saw clearly that Yahweh was giving me an opportunity to be enlarged spiritually through my experiences of suffering. If I could remain patient, gentle, calm, thoughtful of others while refusing to complain, find fault, or bemoan my suffering, then I would make an advancement that could only be gained under such circumstances.

It helped tremendously that I already accepted the fact that suffering is part of the experience of all who would follow Christ. On the morning of the day I was injured I had just posted the writing titled "*Why Does God Require Christians to Suffer?*" I did not think it unusual that I should be experiencing some difficulty, or affliction. I understood that it is in the fire that the sons of God are purified. As they bear up patiently under all kinds of suffering they are transformed more and more into the image of Christ.

Monday the air conditioner repairman stopped by. It was nearly 8 P.M., and he had been long at work, but he came by. He had the problem fixed in about five minutes. Ants had gotten into the electrical connections and were keeping contacts from closing. This is a common problem in the south.

I had just written to a sister a day or two previously about a plague of insects she had been experiencing in her home. She related to me how she had lost her cool, and had acted rebelliously toward her husband, as one small incident after another piled up until she was at a breaking point. Her husband did not want to pay for a pest control company to come in, but she told him he had no choice, and she went and called a company to spray the house. Later, she lamented the fact that she had acted as she had.

I saw a parable in what she shared with me. There are many small agitations that come into our lives, just like the parade of insects into her home. These things can "bug" us. We see them as nuisances, and pests, and our thought is to see them gone so we can be at ease and comfortable again.

In truth, these things are divinely ordered experiences. Yahweh tests us to perfect us. A sister in Christ recently wrote to me and said, "there can be no TESTimony without a TEST." I thought that was very clever, and very true. Sometimes we can handle a large event in our lives, such as my wreck on the motorcycle and the ensuing surgery. But how will we do when we get home and the air conditioner is not working? What if someone begins to speak or act toward us in a dishonorable way. Will we patiently bear with it, or will we in our discomfort blow a fuse?

In our tests we can go one of two ways. We can embrace the suffering and seek to grow spiritually, utilizing that grace which Christ so liberally offers us. Or we can respond in the flesh. We can be self-focused, and snap at others, or explode at circumstances, when they are not to our liking. This latter course will not bring any man to conformity to the image of Christ.

The air conditioning sure feels good this week. It was turned back on Monday night. Tuesday I began noticing a rash coming up on my injured leg. It itched. The next day it had spread. By Thursday it was spread far more and itched tremendously. I contacted the doctor and he advised me to take some Benadryl, suspecting that it is a reaction to some of the strong antibiotics they gave me in the hospital.

I smile as I think of this. We get rid of the ants and in come the fleas. We get rid of the fleas and in come the roaches. They are pests. They do "bug" us, but all things work together for good to those who love God and are the called, according to His purpose. Shall I murmur against God, or shall I grow more in the grace and character of Christ?

People of God, it is appointed unto Christ's disciples to suffer many things. There is no suffering without purpose, and no affliction through which we cannot grow and be enlarged. Did the apostle really mean "everything" when he wrote the following:

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

It is not wrong to ask God for relief from some distress, or trial, but we should always keep in mind that it has come to us from God's hands with good intent. When we come to see suffering as a necessary part of our advancement into the image and likeness of God, we will not be so quick to see only evil in our distresses. We may even come to say with the Psalmist:

Psalms 119:71

It is good for me that I was afflicted...

I admire the apostle Paul's attitude toward the suffering of his life. He learned to meet each new affliction with contentment.

II Corinthians 12:9-10

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Only a person who understands the necessity and purpose of suffering could find contentment with it. May Yahweh have many sons and daughters in these last days who find this place of contentment.



Sharers in Christ's Sufferings

The union of Christ and His body is a great mystery. Much has been written and preached regarding the oneness of Christ and those saints who comprise His body. One aspect of our identification with Christ that has been largely neglected, especially in this late hour at the end of the age, is the church becoming one with Yahshua in His suffering.

The apostles were not averse to speaking openly about this aspect of our union with Christ. They actually had much to say on the subject.

II Corinthians 1:5

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

Now, if Paul had said "the riches of Christ are ours in abundance," or "the pleasures of Christ are ours in abundance," we could be certain that this passage would be one of the most quoted in this hour of sensuality. Yet, that is not what the apostle declares. He says, "the SUFFERINGS of Christ are ours in abundance."

Consider carefully what is being stated. Paul is not speaking of any and all suffering. He is speaking specifically of the sufferings of Christ. These are afflictions and sorrows and trials that are uniquely associated with the Son of God. Let us define these sufferings that Paul is talking about.

The sufferings of Christ are those sufferings which arise as the will of man comes into conflict with the revealed will of God. Christ ALWAYS chose to do the will of the Father. He testified that He did not come to please Himself. The will of God will not lead us to the same experiences we would choose for ourselves. Christ was not born in a mansion. Yahweh did not give His Son a great reputation among the people. Quite the contrary. The Jewish leaders accused Yahshua of being born illegitimately, of being a Samaritan (mixed race), of having a demon.

The Father did not choose for His Son to walk in a position of worldly power and prestige. Christ had no great ministry center. He had no wealth, or political influence. He came to His own, and His own received Him not. Yahweh chose for His Son to perform His ministry as a wanderer, a poor man who was homeless. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had nowhere to lay His head.

Yahshua is a pattern for the body of Christ. Whenever any man or woman accepts the invitation of Christ, when they begin to walk as His disciple, they will be brought to this form of suffering that is unique to Christ. They must act as if they hate their own soul in order to follow in Yahshua's steps.

Luke 14:26

"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate... even his own life (psuche - soul), he cannot be My disciple."

The apostle Paul most certainly has this form of suffering in mind when he declares that "the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance." You cannot be Christ's disciple without experiencing the suffering that arises as your own soul's desires are denied that the will of the Father might be accomplished. The disparity between man's desires and the

Father's are at times extreme.

Matthew 26:38-39

Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

There are times when the Father reveals some trial ahead of us, and everything within our natural being recoils in horror, fear and loathing at what is before us. To be numbered among the overcomers in Christ we must not shrink back at such moments. We must press forward. There are great consequences riding upon our decisions, even as there were for the Son of God in that moment portrayed above.

Hebrews 10:32-39

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Here are described some of the sufferings of Christ. Those who come to Christ, and become partakers of His Spirit, are to surrender their lives to be led of the Spirit in all things. This surrender will result in conflict with the world, and the religious spirits in this fallen world system.

The Hebrew saints addressed in these words experienced "a great conflict of sufferings." These were truly the sufferings of Christ. The Jewish religious leaders persecuted them, and Roman society also did the same. The disciples of Christ were subjected to public reproach. They were made spectacles before their neighbors. They had to accept scorn, shame, and many evil accusations. We read that some were imprisoned. Others had their property seized.

Do not be deceived in thinking such things could not happen to those who walk faithfully with Christ today. I can tell you truly, from my own experience, that such tribulations are as likely today as they were 2,000 years ago. This must be so, for Christ's body has always been perfected through suffering. Let us remember again the words of Paul:

the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance...

This testimony occurs frequently in the Bible.

I Peter 4:12-16

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.

Both Peter and Paul are speaking in harmony. Paul states that the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance. Peter shares that when we encounter the sufferings of Christ we should not act as if some strange thing were happening. What could he possibly mean, other than that being a partaker of Christ's suffering is common to all disciples? Christ's sufferings are to be expected, anticipated, and received with grace. These two apostles are speaking in perfect agreement with the Son of God Himself. Yahshua testified that no man could be His disciple apart from taking up his cross and following Him down an afflicted path. This testimony is found from the gospels to the book of Revelation.

Revelation 1:9

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Yahshua, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Yahshua.

The day is at hand when a remnant of God's people will once again identify themselves as John did in these words. When we speak to a true brother or sister in Christ we will acknowledge one another as "a fellow partaker in the tribulation... and perseverance of Christ." The troubles of Christ are appointed to us in abundance. Think it not strange. These things must be.

In former years the saints in Christ were more amenable to suffering with Christ. I do not mean to suggest that there has ever been more than a remnant who have embraced such things, but at least the church spoke openly about such matters, even if only a few had the attitude of Paul expressed in the following words.

Colossians 1:24

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

In 1693 Thomas Shepherd wrote the first stanza to the hymn titled *Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?*

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for ev'ryone,
And there's a cross for me.*

I recently finished reading the wonderful biography of Amy Carmichael written by Elisabeth Elliot. The title of the book is *A Chance to Die*. Ms. Carmichael left a comfortable life in England in the late 1800s to live among the native people of India as a missionary. She understood something about the ways of God, and the call of the body of Christ to share in the sufferings of Christ. The following poem that she penned gives eloquent testimony to her understanding and her experience.

Hast Thou No Scar

Amy Carmichael

*Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;
I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star.
Hast thou no scar?*

*Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.
Hast thou no wound?*

*No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me.
But thine are whole; can he have followed far
Who hast no wound or scar?*

What a question to ponder in this hour. “Can he have followed far who hast no wound or scar?” I have at times considered that I would not want to stand before Yahshua on the day when I must give an account of my life and not have any testimony of being a partaker of His sufferings. I would be ashamed to stand before the One who suffered so much for me, and to not have suffered anything for Him.

Consider the attitude of Peter, and the other apostles toward suffering.

Acts 5:40-41

After calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Yahshua, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Christ tells the saints that this attitude is right and proper.

Matthew 5:11-12

“Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

People of God, I am not a bold or courageous person. God chose one of the most timid, fearful, weak, and anxious of all men when He claimed me as His son. I have often been in fear and trembling and great anxiety as I have viewed the afflicted path before me. Christ has come to me at such times and given me great comfort and encouragement. Yahshua has held me to the course and preserved me through many perils.

For years, as I followed the leading of the Spirit of Christ, I did not know from one day to the next where my family's provision would come from. I found such an existence to be exceedingly taxing. Yahweh did not choose this path to torment me. Rather, He desired to set me free from the giants of fear and unbelief. I would not have personally chosen to face these giants. I would have avoided them if I could, but I am grateful that my Father had my highest good in mind, and He would not relent despite my many pleas.

I have faced physical trials of health in my body, and among family members, and have been instructed by the Spirit to look to Him for healing. When I was diabetic, and later had a heart attack, the Spirit would not permit me to seek medical care. These things were for my chastening, and I had to bear up under them patiently while trusting my life to the hands of my heavenly Father.

As I have followed Christ wherever He would lead I have been brought into conflict with many other saints. I have been rejected by ministers, put out of churches, and have had my wife and son depart from me. Other ministers and Christians have vilified me, and used their ministry platforms to launch attacks against my character and my teachings. I have accepted poverty during many seasons of this walk, and have been in lack often. Twice I have been jailed. I have faced the threat of having all my possessions taken from me by force. In all these things I had to choose to yield my soul's desires to whatever the Father should choose for me to experience.

It is evident that our Father often chooses for those who follow in Christ's steps to suffer. We should "think it not strange." As we respond to each new trial with faith, grace, patience, forgiveness, and love we will find that Christ is formed more fully in us. This is Yahweh's purpose. He wants us to share His image and likeness. We are matured through those things we suffer.

I am no glutton for suffering. Yet, the Spirit of Christ has shown me that none can come to maturity in Christ apart from accepting that path He has chosen for them. All must yield their lives to the direction of the Holy Spirit. We must not shrink back. We all have need of endurance so that after we have done the will of God we can receive that which is promised.

In Gethsemane the Father presented to His Son a bitter cup of suffering from which He was to drink. Christ's soul had to be crushed as unto death in order for Him to accept that which His Father chose for Him. The Father is offering the same cup to His sons and daughters today. The apostles understood that it is an honor to be invited to drink from the same cup as Christ. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to do so.

Will you accept the invitation to drink from Christ's cup? Will you become a partaker in His sufferings?

*Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for ev'ryone,
And there's a cross for me.*



We Wrestle Not Against Flesh and Blood...

Ephesians 6:12

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...

This series has focused upon the necessity of Christ's disciples to experience suffering. In perhaps a majority of circumstances the sufferings of Christ's disciples come to them through the hands of other men and women. There is a natural enmity between the natural descendants of Adam and the spiritual descendants of Christ. This enmity was viewed as far back as the strife that existed between Cain and Abel, and between Ishmael and Isaac. This enmity continues on to this day.

The disciples of Christ should not be surprised that it is those who confess faith in Christ who are their chief persecutors. It was those who swore allegiance to Yahweh who crucified the Son whom He loved. Yahshua said this same state of things would persist throughout the church age.

John 16:1-2

"These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues (churches); yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."

Who is it that thinks they offer God service except those who claim to be His servants? Yahshua is declaring to His disciples that the very ones who profess obedience to God will become their persecutors. It is Christians who will arise more than any others to inflict reproaches and suffering upon Christ's disciples in this day. They will quote Scriptures as they do so, and present evidence that what they are doing is the will of God.

Yahweh has revealed to me that He has called me to serve as a pioneer and explorer for others of His sons and daughters. He has led me down an afflicted path for these past 12 years that I might serve as a guide, instructor, and encourager to a much larger number of His children who must walk a similar course in these last days. I do not share my experiences to boast of those things I have passed through. Rather, I share them to reveal to my brothers and sisters what Christian discipleship looks like in this hour in a nation such as America.

There are no experiences that the Spirit of Christ has led me through that were not common to the early church. The first disciples' experiences are recorded for us in the New Testament. We have previously read that Christ's disciples suffered many things. They were made a reproach and spectacle before religious and secular people. Some had their possessions confiscated. Others were imprisoned. They were put out of the synagogues. Some suffered beatings, while others were put to death. The sufferings of Christ were shared abundantly among those who accepted Christ's invitation to "Come, take up your cross, and follow Me."

Over time the church at large has drifted away from discipleship, having replaced it with confession of Christ as Savior. The Lordship of Christ is no longer observed in the lives of most who profess to be Christians. There is no surrender, no yielding of one's life to "follow the Lamb where He goes." Because of this, very little of the sufferings of Christ are known to this generation.

Part of the value of Christ having me share the experiences I have encountered since I yielded in 1999 to follow wherever He should lead, and to do whatever He should ask of me, is to demonstrate to the saints that such a walk will result in affliction. Many find it hard to imagine being persecuted as a Christian in a nation such as America. The vast majority of professing Christians get along remarkably well with the society around them. Causes of conflict are difficult for many to imagine.

The lack of suffering among Christians in American society, when compared to the very substantial suffering of those early saints in Roman society, is not due to the world having changed. It is the result of Christians having abandoned the call to be disciples. The following statement is a universal truth throughout all nations and societies during this kingdom age.

II Timothy 3:12

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Yahshua will be persecuted.

During the past 12 years I have experienced tremendous resistance from men and women in American society. There have been reproaches, condemnation, rejection, even attacks and unveiled hatred. The greatest part of this has come from professing Christians. Adamic man has not improved since the days of Christ, nor have the natural affections and passions of the flesh become more accepting of the spiritual. There remains a natural antipathy in the hearts of natural men toward those walking as spiritual. Indeed, there is great hatred, even to the point of murder.

Matthew 24:9-12

“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another... And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.”

James writes to the people of God and reproves those who have an abundance of the world's goods with the following words:

James 5:6

You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

I have found, both in Scripture and in personal experience, that it is those who have much of the world's goods who become exceptionally antagonistic toward the disciples of Christ.

James 2:5-7

Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

Those who love money, comfort, and material possessions find that a natural enmity

exists in their hearts toward those who are Christ's disciples. A man cannot serve God and mammon. Despite this clear declaration of Christ, the vast majority of Christians today are trying to do that which He testified to be impossible. Most Christians are attempting to serve God and to pursue material prosperity at the same time. Little do they realize that in doing so they are adopting a mindset that is antagonistic toward Christ and His disciples. Such ones are at risk of becoming the persecutors of the righteous while thinking they are doing God a favor.

Luke 16:13-15

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things, and they were scoffing at [Yahshua]. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts."

There are many pharisees in the church today. Many of them appear as the most righteous and devoted of all believers. They sit in the best seats, and are given honor, for the leaders of the churches favor those who exude a material prosperity and worldly success.

The Scriptures, personal experience, and the witness of the Spirit of Christ, all lead me to conclude that much of the suffering, reproaches, and persecution that will accrue to those who surrender to follow Christ in this hour will arise from those who profess to follow Christ while pursuing material prosperity. Christ will lead many of His sons and daughters to embrace a path where most, if not all, of their material possessions must be left behind. Having a house, or a nest of their own will no longer be a certainty. Those who follow Christ will of necessity need to manifest a contentment with whatever God chooses for them. There will be periods of lack. Food will not be present in the same abundance as former days, nor the comforts of life that so many take for granted.

Those who esteem such things will become critical of those whose pursuit of obedience to Christ has replaced a pursuit of the material. Family members, church leaders, fellow saints, and the members of a materialistic society will all scorn those whose lives appear to be cursed with poverty. Men and women will receive condemnation for not giving themselves to a pursuit of mammon. They will be vilified as lacking compassion for their family members, of being lazy, prideful, or spiritually deluded.

I am at this very moment aware of saints who are entering into times of material lack as they labor to follow Christ with all their hearts. God has certainly ordered their steps. He has promised not to forsake them. He will provide them their daily needs, but what God has defined as man's need is very different from man's definition.

I Timothy 6:8

And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

Remember once more the Scripture we reviewed in the previous chapter.

Luke 6:20-26

And turning His gaze on His **disciples**, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you

when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.”

Christ is revealing to those who will follow Him that they are going to have a very different experience from those who are full and satisfied, those who are comfortable and full of happiness. If you surrender to follow Christ, you will know lack where others know plenty. You will be reproached when others are honored. You will face difficulty when others are at ease.

Joseph, the son of Jacob, is a type of those who are forerunners in suffering. Joseph knew suffering and reproach when his brothers were living lives of ease as the sons of a wealthy father. Yahweh must have some sons who will embrace suffering that He might bestow promotion upon them. At this hour, many are being called to surrender their lives to follow Christ wherever He would lead. A desire to obey their heavenly Father will lead these sons and daughters into Egypt where they must undergo the furnace of afflictions. For a season they will be separated from their brethren. All natural affection toward them will appear to have disappeared. Great is the reward that awaits those who endure to the end.

The point I want to address in this chapter is that the source of your suffering will very often be people. It is rarely some nameless circumstance that leads to our suffering. There is usually a human hand behind it. When we encounter reproaches and persecution from human sources there is a temptation to enter into striving with man. In counseling with others I have frequently encountered a wrong focus. Many of Christ’s disciples seek to deliver themselves from suffering by contending with those they view as their persecutors. It is never the will of God that we strive with man.

Consider the example of Joseph. After he had matured through many years of suffering in Egypt, this man of God came to understand Yahweh’s purposes in his suffering. Although his brothers had acted with evil intent toward him, Joseph perceived that God had ordained all of his experiences of suffering with good intent. Speaking to his brothers, Joseph declared:

Genesis 50:20

And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

If you surrender your life to follow Christ wherever He would lead, you will find yourself brought into experiences of suffering. Those who you counted as brothers will treat you as their enemy. Some will act with great hatred, seeking to cause you much harm. The reflex of the natural man is to defend oneself, and to strike back. Those who are spiritual must not do so. We have Christ as our pattern.

Acts 8:32

“He was led as a sheep to slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth.”

These words that describe the response of Christ to His attackers are applied to those who would follow in His steps.

Romans 8:36

Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

The apostle Peter testified that Christ did not strive with man. Instead, He entrusted His soul to His Father when enemies arose against Him. Peter presents Christ to the saints as the pattern we are to emulate.

I Peter 2:21-23

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously...

As we observe the life of Christ we find the following pattern. When He was faced with persecution, even crucifixion and death, Christ was silent before man. When He was threatened, He did not threaten in return. When He was reviled, He did not defend His own reputation. When brought before man's courts Christ was silent.

Mark 15:3-5

And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!" But Yahshua still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

The counterpart to this silence before man is that Christ DID make His petition before the Father. Yahshua pleaded with the Father to deliver Him, if it be His will to do so. Ultimately, Christ surrendered to whatever the Father chose for Him to experience.

Luke 22:42

"Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done."

John 12:27-28

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name."

Yahweh has shown me that this is the pattern His saints are to follow when they are facing persecution. He has directed me repeatedly to not strive with man. Even when I have been brought before the courts of this world, I have been instructed to not argue, accuse, nor to present a defense. Like Christ, my petition has been lifted up to the Judge who sits on high. I have made my plea to Yahweh, and I have accepted whatever He should choose for me before I have faced those who judge on earth.

This is a most important matter. As sons of God we must always discern that the

experiences of suffering we face are ultimately chosen for us by our Father in heaven. Did not Christ reveal this when He prayed to His Father in Gethsemane? He understood that the cup of suffering presented to Him was chosen by God. It could only be honorably removed by the same. Christ could have delivered Himself in the courts. He could have mounted a defense. He could have confounded His accusers with His wisdom as He had done so many times before. Yahshua had legions of angels at His dispatch, and could have called on them to deliver Him. Yet, He did none of these things.

As we come to discern the necessity of suffering, and its role in our perfecting as sons of God, we will enter into this same place of rest that was demonstrated by Christ. We will not act out of fear, seeking to deliver ourselves from the suffering we see before us. Those who trust Yahweh will know that He will not ever permit anything to truly harm them. Though our outer man may perish, our inner man will be preserved alive.

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Yahshua our Lord.

It seems strange that the church can read a passage such as this and not understand that it is appointed to the sons of God to suffer many things. Yet, through deceit, often embraced willingly, the church has come to believe that these words speak of someone other than themselves.

If you have embraced the understanding that YOU are called to follow Christ down an afflicted path, you will not think it strange when you encounter difficulties and difficult people. It is my hope that you would perceive that adversaries must come, and many will appear from within the household of God. If you are not afraid of suffering; If you stand in the confidence that it is Yahweh who holds your life in His hands and not man, then you too will be able to resist the urge to enter into contention with flesh and blood. You will be able to bless those who curse you, and to walk calmly to the slaughter as a sheep that is silent.

It is as we quiet our souls in the face of many threats that we begin to experience the release of the Spirit within us. That gentle, patient, forgiving, and longsuffering nature of Christ is revealed in us. Perhaps we too will find that some will be brought to marvel at the peace in which we abide. Such is the faith that overcomes the world.



The Privilege of Persecution

Luke 6:22-23

“Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.”

In recent days two separate articles have come to my attention that reveal that persecution of Christians is on the increase in America. The Spirit expressly testifies that these things will increase, and very markedly so. We are at that time which the Bible refers to as “the beginning of birthpangs.” In order for mature sons and daughters of God to come forth, the church must pass through a season of pain and sorrow. When it is observed that a “man child” has come forth to the glory of God, all the pain of what was experienced will be forgotten.

Matthew 24:8-13

“But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.”

John 16:21-22

“A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And you now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man takes from you.”

When the church observes actual instances of Christian persecution in America, the response of many is shock and outrage. Many are tempted to resist such persecution through whatever political or human means that are at hand. Such responses reveal a wrong mindset, and a misapprehension of the purpose of suffering. Suffering is not a great evil to be avoided at any cost; It is a privilege to be borne by those who are true disciples of Christ.

Let me share with you an excerpt from the first article that recently drew my attention to the escalating persecution of Christians and their beliefs.

Gay activists get LifeSiteNews translator and pro-family activist Julio Severo cut off by PayPal

by Matthew Cullinan Hoffman

September 19, 2011 (LifeSiteNews.com) - Under pressure from homosexual activists, PayPal has decided to deny service to famed Brazilian pro-life and pro-family Christian activist Julio Severo.

In addition, at least two Christian organizations targeted by the same activists remain under investigation by PayPal and may also lose use of the service.

Severo, an Evangelical essayist who also translates for LifeSiteNews, maintains

a highly influential blog in Portuguese that is read and commented on by politicians in Brazil's federal government. He is also the author of several books, including a work on the homosexual movement in Brazil.

Severo's use of PayPal has been targeted in recent weeks by the homosexual group "All Out," which has created an online petition to urge PayPal to dump Severo and nine other PayPal users as purveyors of "hate" and "extremism." Severo's site expresses love of homosexuals and a concern that homosexual behavior is destructive to those who participate in it.

Following the initiation of the campaign, Severo and several others on the list have been contacted by PayPal, asking for information on their organizations and implying that they are not in compliance with PayPal policies.

Following Severo's response noting that he is not an organization, only an individual, PayPal responded today stating, "We appreciate your interest in PayPal. However, due to legal and regulatory constraints, PayPal Private Limited is unable to process donation payments for non-registered charities and non-profit organizations (NPOs); political party/organizations; religious institutions; personal/organizational fundraisers, etc in countries under its jurisdiction."

"This is not a decision we make lightly, and we deeply regret any inconvenience or frustration this matter may cause you," PayPal adds. "Please understand that this decision is final."

The organization adds that it will not permit Severo to access any funds remaining in the account for 180 days, after which it will inform him of how to recover them... Homosexuals also managed to remove Severo's blog from Blogger for a short period of time in 2008, after complaining about its content. However, following a massive outcry from Brazilian Christians, his site was restored.

"I am very worried, because PayPal caved in to gay militants and their hate campaign to have me excluded from PayPal," Severo told LifeSiteNews.

"I use PayPal to pay for essential services for me and my family. And we are in a very limited situation, because we are away from Brazil because of gay and government persecution. Our resources are limited," he added. "And now under pressure of my persecutors, PayPal is making sure that my ways to receive donations may be even more limited and hard.

"Millions of individuals use PayPal to receive money. Why cannot I receive too?" Severo asks and points out that "I am not a charity. I am only a Christian individual with a wife and four little children..."

[Source: <http://www.lifesitenews.com>]

As a Christian teacher with a website hosted by Blogger, who also receives gifts from Christian brothers and sisters through Paypal, this story strikes close to home. Satan has often employed fear of suffering as a tool to silence Christians and to drive truth underground. Should I begin to censor my writings to insure that they do not offend various groups or individuals, fearing that my source of support, or my ability to share publicly with others, might be cut off? Once we begin down the path of permitting fear to dictate our actions it is very difficult to recover.

As Christ is our pattern, we do not see that He ever compromised in speaking forth the mind of His Father. Even when He knew that the religious leaders of Israel would be incensed and begin seeking His life, He spoke boldly and without apology. Yahshua

entrusted His life into the hands of His Father knowing that He would be protected until the time appointed by the Father for Him to suffer.

In Peter, we initially see a very different response. Observing that Christ's open declaration of the things of God led to arrest and suffering, Peter was initially cowed as he feared the same result. Three times on the night of Christ's arrest, Peter denied that he even knew Yahshua. To save himself from suffering, Peter denied the Lord who had chosen him.

At the third appearing of Christ after His resurrection, we find Yahshua speaking to Peter about his failure. Even as Peter denied Yahshua three times, Christ asks him three times, "Peter, do you love Me?" Christ then tells Peter that he cannot avoid suffering, but must embrace it. Only in this way will Peter be able to fulfill the desire of God and be brought to the full image of Christ.

John 21:17-20

Yahshua said to him..., "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

These words of Christ, although having a literal fulfillment, were spoken as a parable to reveal spiritual truth. In our immaturity, our lives are guided by our own soul. Our souls seek to avoid suffering, but following such a course causes Christians to remain as spiritual children. In order to progress to maturity we must all stretch out our hands and embrace the suffering of the cross appointed to us. We cannot refuse to share in the sufferings of Christ. It is only through suffering that we are brought to a mature conformity to Christ.

Yahshua was expressing to Peter that he must yield to the cross, and become willing to go where his own soul would not choose to go. If Peter would advance to spiritual maturity ("when you grow old"), he must permit someone else to gird him and guide him. This person is the Spirit of Christ. He will clothe us in garments of humility and lead us down an afflicted path.

People of God, this story about Paypal cutting off service to this man who has been speaking out openly against the sin of homosexuality is just one example of the growing intolerance of the preaching of Biblical truth. This morning a sister forwarded to me a link to a story on the website *Prison Planet*. It lists 18 (6+6+6) examples of the persecution of Christians at this hour. Whether each of these events are truly examples of suffering for Christ, I am unable to judge. However, I am persuaded that Christian persecution is on the increase, and will only accelerate. Following is an excerpt from the article:

#1 Home Bible studies are now banned in the city of San Juan Capistrano, California. According to city officials, regular gatherings "of more than three people" in private homes are simply not allowed. One couple that has held home Bible studies for years has already been fined twice [2] and is being threatened with even more fines.

#2 Paypal has initiated "formal investigations" of a large number of Christian websites and organizations. Apparently, many of these investigations have been launched due to concerns that these websites and organizations do not hold to a "politically-correct" view of sexuality...

#3 In Wichita, Kansas last year, a Christian minister was handcuffed and hauled off to jail by police for sharing the gospel and handing out tracts to Muslims on a public sidewalk. Apparently freedom of speech does not apply on the public sidewalks of America any longer.

#4 In the UK, police recently threatened a cafe owner with arrest for silently playing a Bible DVD on a small television on the back wall of his cafe. The following is an excerpt from a Daily Mail article about this incident....

Mr Murray, 31, was left shocked after he was questioned for nearly an hour by the officers, who arrived unannounced at the premises.

He said he had turned off the Bible DVD after an 'aggressive inquisition' during which he thought he was going to be arrested and 'frog-marched out of the cafe like a criminal.'

#5 Last year, a high school student in Southern California was suspended for two days because he had private conversations with his classmates during which he discussed Christianity. He was also banned from bringing his Bible to school ever again.

#6 Big cable networks regularly feature "comedians" that love to mock Christians. For example, HBO "comedian" Bill Maher recently stated that "there's a term for people who hate charity and love killing: Christian."

#7 Down in Texas, the Department of Veteran Affairs actually tried to ban prayers that include the words "God" or "Jesus" during funeral services for veterans.

#8 In North Carolina last year, a pastor was dismissed from his chaplain duties for praying in the name of Jesus.

#9 An unclassified Department of Homeland Security report published a couple years ago entitled "Right-wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment" claims that a belief in Bible prophecy "could motivate extremist individuals and groups to stockpile food, ammunition and weapons." The report goes on to state that such people are potentially dangerous.

#10 Back on February 20, 2009, the State of Missouri issued a report entitled "MIAC Strategic Report: The Modern Militia Movement." That report warned that the following types of people may be potential terrorists....

**anti-abortion activists*

**those that are against illegal immigration*

**those that consider "the New World Order" to be a threat*

**those that have a negative view of the United Nations*

#11 All over the nation, "child protection agencies" are ripping an inordinate number of children out of Christian homes. In many of these cases the parents believe in homeschooling their children or they do not believe in having their children vaccinated.

#12 On June 18, 2010 two Christians decided that they would peacefully pass out copies of the gospel of John on a public sidewalk outside a public Islamic festival in Dearborn, Michigan and within three minutes 8 police officers surrounded them and placed them under arrest.

#13 A Christian consultant was recently fired by Bank of America and by Cisco because they discovered a book that he had written that expressed Christian viewpoints about social issues.

#14 A while back, a federal judge actually ruled that the University of California can deny

course credit to applicants from Christian high schools that use textbooks that teach that it was God who created the earth.

#15 Back in 2009, one 8 year old boy in Massachusetts was sent home from school and was forced to undergo a psychological evaluation because he drew a picture of Jesus on the cross.

#16 The Obama administration has announced that there is a whole host of laws that it will not be enforcing, but one thing that the Obama administration has chosen to do is to aggressively pursue lawsuits against anti-abortion protesters.

#17 During a Congressional hearing earlier this year, U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee warned that "Christian militants" might try to "bring down the country" and that such groups need to be investigated.

#18 According to a shocking FBI document obtained by Oath Keepers, the FBI definition of "suspicious activity" now includes making "extreme religious statements" and believing in "radical theology."

[Source: <http://www.prisonplanet.com>]

Christ's theology in His day was certainly considered "radical." So too was the preaching of the apostle Paul. Not surprisingly, their words stirred up strong emotions and at times a violent response from those who heard them. If the sons of God speak forth those things Yahweh's Spirit delivers to them to speak in this hour, it too will be considered radical, offensive, and will provoke a response of persecution.

John 15:20

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."

II Timothy 3:10-12

But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Yahshua will be persecuted.

When Paul speaks of being delivered by the Lord out of all his persecutions, he is not implying that he was spared experiences of suffering. Christ gave Paul strength to stand, and not shrink back, when faced with suffering. It was the will of Christ that Paul suffer many things. This fact was expressed at the very time of Paul's conversion.

Acts 9:15-16

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

Although you and I may never be called to suffer as many things as Paul, Yahweh has specifically appointed experiences of suffering for everyone who would follow in the steps of Christ. We must not shrink back from these experiences as Peter did on the night of Christ's arrest. We must embrace the cross appointed to each of us.

The vast majority of Christians in America who come across articles such as those

cited in this chapter will be alarmed. Their immediate response will be to cry out in indignation, and perhaps to engage in some carnal means of averting further persecution against Christians. The church has not been taught the role and necessity of suffering for Christ. Deceptive teachings that assert that God wants to provide an uninterrupted life of blessing and prosperity to the saints has deeply weakened the churches ability to stand. When persecution and suffering presents itself to the church in coming days, a great many will fall away.

Mark 4:16-17

“And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.”

Christ encouraged those who would follow as His disciples to adopt a very different mindset from that which is so prevalent in this hour of sensuality, ease, and comfort. He told His disciples to think of themselves as “blessed” when all men hate them. He told them to “leap for joy” with the understanding that they have a great reward in heaven.

It is a privilege to be permitted to share in the sufferings of Christ. In coming days, many saints will be invited to partake of this privilege. To natural eyes, such things look like no privilege at all. Men think it a curse to be turned out of homes, to have their possessions confiscated, to be arrested, reproached, blasphemed, and roughly treated. In coming days, many will be put in prisons, and some will lose their lives for their obedience to follow Christ wherever He would lead. Let us have our minds made up ahead of time that we will accept whatever comes, and not turn back.

Revelation 12:11

“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.”

Let us “think it not strange” when these experiences come to us. Tribulation is appointed to all of the sons of God. There is a cup of suffering that Christ drank from, and He would offer it to all who are called and chosen as sons. There is a baptism of fire that all must pass through.

Mark 10:39

Yahshua said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.”

Let us not be alarmed at the increasing enmity of the world toward Christianity. These things must come. The swelling tide of Christian antipathy cannot be turned back through political activism, through boycotts, letter writing campaigns, or any other means. Christ prophesied that His disciples would be hated by all nations. It is vain to seek to produce a safe society where Christians can worship God and serve Him unmolested. To seek such a course will only result in a watered down message, compromised obedience, and disciples of Christ that have lost their saltiness and are good for nothing.

The Father has been merciful to me and has never shown me too much of what lies

ahead. Yahshua testified, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," urging His disciples to "take no thought for tomorrow." Tomorrow will come. There will be evil things we must pass through. Many will be rejected by family, friends, church members, and society. Some will experience the loss of all worldly possessions. More than a few will be beaten, imprisoned and even put to death. As the elect of God bear up patiently under all things while maintaining a heart of love and forgiveness, they will prove that they are worthy of the name of Christ, and that the world is not worthy of them.

Hebrews 11:35-38

And others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

We should not be surprised that Paypal should refuse service to the disciples of Christ in these last days. An hour is coming when those who bear the imprint of Christ, and have overcome the mark of the beast, will not be permitted to buy or sell in a world under the dominion of Satan. The faith of the saints must be tested. Those who stand fast will find that their faith will be purified even as gold is refined in a fire.

Our faith is precious in the eyes of God. Let us not cast away our confidence, for the words of the apostle are true:

I Peter 5:10

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

There is a beneficent purpose behind the suffering appointed to us. Yahweh would have us perfected and established as sons ready to receive an inheritance imperishable in the heavens. Let all who would be perfect put on the mind of Christ who said, "Not My will, but Thy will be done."



The Christian Life as Tragedy

You are probably familiar with the genre of writing known as tragedy. Some famous examples of this form of writing are William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Macbeth*. One definition for the writing form known as Tragedy is, "any literary composition, as a novel, dealing with a somber theme carried to a tragic conclusion."

The life of a Christian disciple is aptly described by these words, but only insofar as it relates to our experiences on this earth. What most eyes fail to see, even Christian eyes, is that when the final curtain closes on this earthly life, there opens an entirely new curtain into realms of life in the Spirit. This present life is only the precursor to much greater things to come.

The shortsightedness, unbelief, and carnal desires of many Christians lead them to view this life as the main event, if not the only event. Although a great many Christians speak of life after death, heaven, and ages to come, they do not actually put any stock in such notions. They live as if there is no tomorrow, as if this present life is all there is. Having such a mindset, they are very much intent on enjoying their good things now. I have shared previously the plethora of books put out by a myriad of Christian authors that promote the pursuit of worldly success, pleasure and prosperity.

One very evident fact that stands out as I contemplate the prosperity message is that it is advocating something very different than a life of tragedy and suffering. No doubt, many would question whether it is appropriate to describe the Christian life as tragedy. The Bible reveals that such a description is very fitting. The apostle Paul stated:

I Corinthians 15:19

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Paul's statement is easily understood. Paul knew that Christ's invitation was to "come and suffer." There is a cross for every disciple who would follow in the steps of Christ.

I Peter 2:21

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...

The life of Christ is given to the church as a pattern of all who would follow Him. The life of Yahshua was described in the following manner:

Isaiah 53:3

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

From a temporal viewpoint, the life of Christ was a tragedy. Yahshua had formerly existed in the likeness of God, and shared in Yahweh's glory. Yet He emptied Himself and took on the form of a bondservant. His life had been scripted for Him before He ever came to earth. This fact is quite easily defended by the myriad of prophecies that were spoken hundreds of years before His birth.

Yahweh had foreordained everything that was to occur in the life of His Son. The story Yahweh wrote for His Son was one of tragedy and suffering.

Acts 2:23

This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Isaiah 53:10

Yahweh was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief...

Yahweh wrote the life story of His Son before He was born of a virgin. The story was one of persecution and much affliction. Christ came to His own, and His own people received Him not. He was rejected, and persecuted by the one's He came to save. Yahshua was accused of having a demon, of being illegitimately born, of being a Samaritan, whom the Jewish people despised. Christ was born in poverty, and His life ended in shame as He was cruelly beaten, scourged, and crucified between two thieves.

This is the story that Yahweh wrote for His beloved Son, and it is truly a tragedy. If Christ's life had ended at the cross, it would be the saddest story ever told. But it did not end there.

Philippians 2:8-11

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Yahshua every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yahshua Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ arose from the dead, and He has been seated at the right hand of God. All power and all authority has been entrusted to Him. Yahshua is now clothed in glory, and the angels in heaven bow before Him in worship and adoration.

What this entire series has been seeking to emphasize is that there is a pattern to Yahweh's work among mankind. Christ's life reveals this pattern. There is humility before exaltation, and suffering before glory.

Proverbs 15:33

Before honor comes humility.

I Peter 4:13

To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

First there is suffering, then there is glory. Yahweh has stamped this pattern upon the entire creation. There are none who can overturn this order that has been established by the counsel of God. All must pass through suffering on their way to exaltation as sons of God. Even as a play opens with Act One, Scene One, so too has Yahweh ordained that our pathway to progression as mature sons in His image must begin with sorrow. He has called

this opening experience of our lives, “the first things.”

Revelation 21:4

And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; ***the first things*** have passed away.

This pattern is declared everywhere throughout the pages of Scripture. It is an inviolable principle. It is appointed unto mankind to experience mourning, crying and pain. There will be sorrow and suffering in this age, but those who embrace it, and walk faithfully with the Father, will find that it is merely the precursor to far surpassing and glorious things to come.

Psalms 126:5-6

Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

II Corinthians 4:17

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...

Romans 8:18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

These last two passages were written by the apostle Paul. His life on this earth was also a tragedy. Yahweh was the author of those experiences Paul was required to pass through. At the very time that Yahweh made His call on Paul's life known, He declared:

Acts 9:15-16

He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.

People of God, the Spirit expressly declares that God has a predetermined path for each of our lives. The plan He has designed for you and I could very aptly be described as a tragedy, for He promises that the only way to life is by following an “afflicted path,” and no man can be Christ's disciple unless he takes up “his cross” and follows in the steps of Yahshua. The following words summarize the experience set before those who accept Christ's invitation to follow Him.

Romans 8:35-36

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

Yes, these words are written for your sake, and mine. Whenever a man or woman surrenders their life to follow Christ they will be led into much tribulation. Christ promises no disciple ease and comfort and blessing in this life. What He promises is that they will experience the same sufferings of which He was made a partaker. Yet, as they yield themselves to follow in His steps, they will be laying up for themselves joy and riches and honor and glory that is far beyond compare.

Paul said that while he was following Christ he was “afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within” (II Corinthians 7:5). Yet, the time came when Paul had faithfully completed his course and he was standing at the finish line. Paul had arrived at the end of the “first things” and was poised to enter into the good things to come. He wrote:

II Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Who are those who love Christ’s appearing? It is those who have heeded the call to follow hard after Christ, walking the same afflicted path He walked. Of these it is written:

I Corinthians 2:9

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

People of God, this present life that you and I live exists for a brief moment. It only seems like this life is endless. There are far surpassing ages to come. Yet this is the time given for you and I to share in the sufferings of Christ. To the degree that we do so we will be able to rejoice at His appearing, for we will then share in His glory.

This present life has been choreographed by the Father. He has written up Act One of each of our lives as a tragedy. But the story of our lives does not end there. It is only the beginning. We must pass through sorrows, for a brief moment, but it leads to far greater things.

Yahweh has given mankind the parable of childbirth to help us to understand this process. Life must always spring forth out of sorrow. Yet, for those who submit to this process, the joy that follows will be so far surpassing all other experiences that the sorrow that preceded it will be forgotten.

John 16:20-22

“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a man has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”

This pattern is observed everywhere in creation and in the pages of Scripture. Yet, the church has failed to see it. Yahweh has testified of His people:

Isaiah 42:19-20

Who is blind but My servant, or so deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is so blind as he that is at peace with Me, or so blind as the servant of Yahweh? You have seen many things, but you do not observe them; Your ears are open, but none hears.

How can millions of Christians go to their churches week after week and listen to the Scriptures read, while remaining oblivious to this pattern that Yahweh has established? How can they believe teachers of myths and fables who assure them that they can walk a broad path of prosperity, ease, and comfort now, and be assured all the glories of heaven in the ages to come? Are they not willingly deceived, for such falsehood appeals greatly to the soul of man?

Christ has done a marvelous thing. He has made a way for mankind to pass out of death and to obtain to the divine life He shares with His Father. He did not provide an easy path, but He said it would be worth it to follow in His steps. None who ever submit to follow Christ by taking up their cross will ever declare at the end of the road that the way was too hard, or too difficult. Instead, the testimony of the saints will be, "Is that all I had to suffer? Is there no more? The reward is far too great, and I am unworthy." Then the saints will cast their crowns at the feet of Christ, for He alone is worthy to obtain all glory, power and honor. What tremendous grace is manifested that Yahshua would share these things with us!

Yet, Christ asks one thing. If you would be a sharer in His glory, He would ask you to first share with Him in His suffering. He invites you and I to take up our cross and follow Him.

Romans 8:16-17

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, ***if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.***

Is this too much for Christ to ask? He would invite us to partake of momentary, light afflictions that we might be brought to maturity spiritually, becoming fit to share in His power and authority for the ages to come.

II Timothy 2:12

If we endure, we will also reign with Him...

If you have spent much time in the Christian religious system of this day, no doubt you have not heard a message such as this. Is it not surprising how very many Scriptures there are that proclaim this message, yet they are unobserved by the church today?

Yahweh has a plan for your life. He has a path He would invite you to walk, even as He had one for His firstborn Son. He has revealed that it is an afflicted path, but He promises to walk with you the entire way. He declares that nothing will ever separate you from His love, not even death. It is up to you and I to choose whether we will accept the script Yahweh has written for our lives, or whether we will refuse it and write our own.

Christ has said that there are few who find the path to life, while vast hordes are on the broad path that leads to destruction. Which way will you choose? The end of the path

through this present life will be arrived at very quickly for each of us. Then we will see whether we chose our path with wisdom. Did we choose like Esau to despise our inheritance and birthright to momentarily satisfy the desires of the flesh? Or did we accept an evil path in hope of obtaining a glorious inheritance at the end?

Our Father knows our frame, that we are but dust. He knows that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. He will be compassionate to our weaknesses, and He will patiently guide all who will yield to accept that story He has written for their life. Yet, let none anticipate that they will receive the reward of the overcomer in Christ if they have spurned that Way God has prepared for them to walk. We will all reap what we sow. This too is an inviolable principle.



The God Who Wounds

The God Who Wounds

Hosea 6:1-2

“Come, let us return to Yahweh. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him.”

I write these words from a hospital bed. My left leg is wrapped from the knee down to the toes. It is propped up on two pillows in the bed that has become my narrow sphere of activity. I have an IV line in one arm, and my crutches are leaning against the end of the bed should I need to get up. My left leg now bears numerous external scars, and internally has titanium plates and screws attached to the bones.

The question arises, “Was it the Father who wounded me? Was it the Shepherd of my soul that led me to this experience of suffering?” It is hard for many Christians to confess that the Father would inflict experiences of suffering upon anyone, much less His own children. I often hear Christians speak of some injury inflicted upon themselves, or others, with expressions such as “God **allowed** this to happen,” or “God did not cause this suffering, but He **permitted** it.”

Why do we have such reticence in stating frankly that God is the One who inflicts injury, or subjects a person, to suffering? The answer, I believe, has much to do with mankind viewing suffering as evil. Logic leads the natural mind to conclude that only an evil being would inflict suffering on another person. It has been my goal in this series of writings to set forth a different view of suffering. Suffering, rather than being evil, is necessary for the development of God’s sons and daughters. The role of suffering in bringing mankind to spiritual maturity is revealed in a number of Scriptures that speak of the suffering of Christ.

Hebrews 2:10

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.**

Hebrews 5:7-9

In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, **though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.** And **having been perfected,** He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...

The Greek word translated as “perfect” and “perfected” in these verses is “teleios.” It means “To bring to maturity. To make whole, entire, and lacking in nothing.” It is the will of God the Father that He have many sons (both male and female) who will attain to spiritual maturity. Christ was the forerunner. He was perfected through suffering, and this is the manner in which all sons must be brought to that full maturity Yahweh desires for His saints.

Ephesians 4:13

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

From the time of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, Yahweh revealed that suffering would play a key role in bringing forth sons in the image and likeness of God. In Yahweh's words to the woman we find a profound parable revealing suffering's role in producing sons that are pleasing to God.

Genesis 3:16

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children; Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Much has been written and taught about this passage, but few have understood the spiritual parable contained in it. Adam is a type and shadow of the Last Adam, who is Christ.

I Corinthians 15:45-47

So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual.

Eve is also given as a type and shadow of Christ's bride, the church.

Ephesians 5:31-32

For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

When God spoke to Eve in the Garden, He was revealing spiritual truth relating to the church. It is Yahweh's desire that He have many sons in His image. Through the natural experience of the woman He has revealed that these sons can only be produced through experiences of pain. Yahweh, in His infinite wisdom and love, has determined this. Notice that He declared to Eve, "**I** will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth." It is Yahweh who is the initiator of this pain.

Despite the suffering and pain associated with natural childbirth, billions of women have survived it and have brought forth offspring. Similarly, the church can only bring forth mature sons through experiences of pain and suffering. The church must accept this suffering as the will of Christ. This is what is indicated in the words:

"Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Christ is the husband to the church. He is Lord, and rightfully must rule over the individual members of the church. In His role as Lord, Yahshua has revealed to all who

would follow after Him that they must experience suffering. He has invited men and women to “take up your cross and follow Me.” Despite the fact that Christ would lead men and women into experiences of suffering, there are those whose “desire” is for Christ, and they willingly submit to Him ruling over them.

We previously looked at a Scripture passage where Christ compared the sufferings of His disciples to a woman in the pains of childbirth. This is an apt analogy. Yahweh does everything with great design and purpose. The suffering of the woman in childbirth was given to reveal a profound kingdom truth. Mature (perfected) sons can only be produced through suffering.

I Peter 5:10

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

It is appointed to you and I to “suffer for a little while.” Our sufferings may seem terrible and unending, but in God’s sight they are but a moment. Soon they will be forgotten. Christ will wipe away every tear from the eyes of His holy ones, and sorrow and suffering will be no more. The apostle Paul saw these present experiences of suffering from God’s perspective. Paul freely admitted that if this present life were all there is that Christ’s disciples would be among all men the most to be pitied. At the same time, Paul saw beyond these present experiences. Yahweh had given Paul visions of things to come. With the future ages in view Paul wrote:

Romans 8:18-23

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Paul continued the analogy of childbirth. He acknowledged the role of pain and suffering in this process. Paul begins this passage by speaking of the “sufferings of this present time,” and he ends by speaking of groaning and suffering.

Quite often when thinking about the “sufferings of Christ” we think only about persecution. I have already touched on this aspect of the sufferings of Christ. In the passage above Paul reveals that the sufferings Yahweh subjects His sons to includes suffering that is common to the entire creation. Sickness and injury are forms of suffering we find everywhere throughout the earth. Yahweh will use these also to bring His people to perfection. Let us look at two verses that affirm this truth of Yahweh being the originator of the suffering of the saints.

Micah 4:6-7

"In that day," declares Yahweh, "I will assemble the lame and gather the outcasts, ***even those whom I have afflicted***. I will make the lame a remnant and the outcasts a strong nation, and Yahweh will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever."

The highlighted portion of this passage states plainly that Yahweh is intentionally, deliberately, and with great purpose, choosing to afflict those called to be overcomers in Christ. The ways in which Yahweh will afflict a man or woman are varied. The apostle Paul was given to the body of Christ as an example of a man who was brought to spiritual maturity through suffering. I have previously cited Scriptures where Paul spoke of being stoned, beaten, whipped, chained and imprisoned. Paul also suffered the experience of being shipwrecked. Storms are a natural part of the suffering the creation has been subjected unto. God does not spare His sons and daughters from passing through storms, but He has promised to walk with us through them. Yahweh sustained Paul through repeated shipwrecks.

Paul also experienced another type of natural suffering: sickness. Paul had a severe affliction of his eyes that left him nearly blind. This affliction was evidently something that marred his appearance, for Paul described it as a trial to those who observed him in this state.

Galatians 4:13-15

But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Yahshua Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

Did Paul have some loathsome condition, something difficult to look at? I believe it is very possible, for that affliction God sent to Paul was intended to keep him humble. That which keeps us humble is humiliating. Paul had been used of God to heal myriads of people, but he could not heal himself. Three times Paul requested that Yahweh remove this affliction from him, but God would not do so.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me - to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

A thorn in the flesh is another way of saying "a bodily affliction." Yahweh afflicts the bodies of His sons and daughters in many ways. I was born with Osteogenesis Imperfecta, commonly called "Brittle Bone Disease." I am laid up in a hospital bed at this moment with

multiple fractures to my left leg. I experienced my first fracture at the age of seven when I broke my thumb. Soon thereafter I broke my right leg twice, my left leg once, my right elbow twice and my left elbow once, and fractured ribs. All of this occurred by the time I turned 15. In my adult years I broke my right ankle while in my thirties, experiencing a partial tear to the anterior cruciate ligament in the right knee at the same time. I have dislocated my shoulders numerous times, and now I have sustained several fractures to my lower left leg.

Even as a child I understood that it was ultimately God who determined my afflictions. When I was around ten or twelve years old and had just experienced another fracture, I remember asking my Dad why God chose for me to suffer these things. I have learned much about the purpose of suffering in the years since then. I still perceive the hand of God in the things I suffer. I do not merely say that He permits me to suffer. I confess that He **causes** me to suffer. Yet, I also understand that a God of love will only afflict His children with good intent. There is no evil judgment, or censure of God, when I say that He causes me to suffer.

Some Christians attribute all suffering to Satan. Paul himself spoke of his affliction as being "a messenger of Satan." The Scriptures reveal that Satan's access to the Christian is restricted. He can only do that which God grants him permission to do. In the Gospels Christ tells Peter that Satan had demanded permission to sift Peter as wheat (Luke 22:31). Had Christ not granted permission to Satan, he could not have come against Peter. We see the same truth revealed in the book of Job. Satan could only touch Job's life insofar as Yahweh permitted.

Job 1:12

Then Yahweh said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him."

Job 2:6

So Yahweh said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life."

There is a magnificent promise found in the New Testament whereby God assures Christians that their trials and tests will always be measured to them with great care. Yahweh has promised that no child of His will ever face a trial, or temptation greater than their ability to walk victoriously through it. I have often found great consolation in this verse that I memorized in my youth.

I Corinthians 10:13

For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads] has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But God is faithful [to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable and strong and powerful to bear up under it patiently.

[Amplified Bible]

There are times when it certainly feels like we are being tested beyond our ability to bear. It is at such times that Yahweh stretches us, inducing us to force our roots deeper into the life of Christ, to find a greater place of abiding in Him. We must be pressed to our limits at times that we might grow stronger spiritually. Our Father will never permit us to face any temptation, or experience of suffering, that is greater than our ability to patiently bear it if we will avail ourselves of the grace made freely available to us. When Paul entreated Yahweh to deliver him from the affliction he was suffering, the Father's answer was "My grace is sufficient for you." Yahweh's grace is always sufficient. Nothing can separate us from His love.

There have been times recently when my soul was weary of dealing with bodily affliction. At such times we are tempted to voice some complaint to God. We need to resist the temptation to grumble, murmur, or find fault with what Yahweh chooses for us. Grace is always present to enable us to rest in God and to trust Him in the time of suffering.

I have found it helpful to not allow my mind to dwell on the entirety of the experience before me. It may be months before my body is healed from my present injury. The thought of enduring week after week of bodily affliction can be overwhelming. At such times, the words of Christ prove to be of great value.

Matthew 6:34

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

It is enough to live one day at a time. Yahweh's grace is sufficient for each day, being perfectly matched to those experiences of suffering He chooses for the perfecting of His sons and daughters.

Before I end this chapter, a word needs to be shared concerning discerning the various reasons for suffering. There are certainly times when Yahweh will remove an affliction if we ask Him to. There are times when Yahweh would have us to stand against a demonic attack. Additionally, some sickness comes in order to demonstrate the glory of God as He brings supernatural healing. The people of God should always seek to know the Father's mind concerning those experiences they are passing through. It was well that Paul sought God concerning his affliction. It was also good that Paul accepted the Father's will when Yahweh revealed the reason for the thorn in his flesh.

It is beyond the scope of this writing to discuss all the reasons afflictions come into the life of a Christian, and to know when the suffering is to be resisted as an attack of the adversary and when it is to be accepted as the will of God. Suffice it to say that the saint should always seek to know the mind and will of the Father. Yahweh has given His Spirit to indwell us that we might know His thoughts, and gain an understanding of His will.

A great deal of suffering comes into the life of the Christian due to their own disobedience. I have suffered much in my life because of sin. I have been slow to subdue the appetites of my flesh. In my body I have suffered ill health due to being overweight and eating things that were not health promoting. The saint should always seek to discern whether his/her experiences of suffering are due to some disobedience in their life. Only by identifying the disobedience can repentance and healing come.

Some have gone too far down this path and have suggested that all sickness and injury is the result of disobedience. Others respond to all sickness and injury as if it were an attack of Satan and they immediately begin rebuking the devil. There are also those who are too

complacent in accepting all injury and suffering as being the will of God. In all things we need the mind of Christ. We are called to walk by the Spirit. Let us press in to know His mind regarding the experiences of our lives. We have a loving Father, and He will not leave us without direction.

What the Scriptures do reveal is that Yahweh does afflict His people. He wounds, and He heals. He tears us, and He bandages us. There is an afflicted path that leads to life. Yahweh's Spirit will guide all faithfully down that path who will yield their lives to follow in the steps of Christ.

II Corinthians 4:17

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...



Suffering's Role in Spiritual Growth

There is a very important, and little understood principle, to be addressed in this chapter. The principle can be summarized as the following:

The strength of the natural man must be broken in order for a spiritual creation born of the seed of Christ to be revealed in us.

Whenever a man is strong in a natural sense, the development of the spiritual man is inhibited. I would include here an excerpt from a previous writing titled *The Shattered People* that speaks of this principle.

All of us are like the seed of an oak, or even the seed of a grain of wheat. The life within the seed is there with all of the potential to grow into the pattern of that which it came from. Yet the outer shell restricts this life from coming forth. Even as a seed must fall into the ground and die, being subjected to freezing, flood, heat and pressure, resulting in the outer shell being broken open, so too must the lives of the saints be subjected to great stress in order for the life of Christ to be revealed. Christ Yahshua said we had but two options: we can fall on the Rock and be broken to pieces, or the Rock can fall on us and scatter us like dust (Matthew 21:44).

Recently, the Spirit revealed this truth of the necessity for brokenness in a most poignant way. I know of a man in his sixties who has been a child of God nearly forty years. There was much hardness in this man's life, and the outer shell of his natural man greatly constricted the flow of the Spirit within him. He was prone to speak very cutting and hard words to members of his family, wounding many of them.

About a year ago this man had to undergo major surgery, and he nearly died. After his surgery he was left in a very weakened state physically, mentally, and emotionally. His natural strength was abated. In his weakened condition the Spirit was able to move in his life and to express qualities of meekness, gentleness, humility and love. In his vulnerability and weakness he expressed many words of regret about his past hardness, and the failures of his life. He called up family members, and with tears he spoke of his regret over his hardness, and he asked forgiveness of those whom he had hurt.

Over time this man's strength began to return, and as it has the former hardness that was a characteristic of his natural man has also returned. He has returned to speaking hard and injurious words to those around him. As I contemplated this I saw clearly why the Spirit must bring all of God's children to places of brokenness. We all "have this treasure in earthen vessels," even the very life and Spirit of Christ. Yet this life will be as a bottle of precious and costly perfume that has never been opened if we protect it and do not allow it to be shattered. The scriptures give us a beautiful picture of this.

Mark 14:3

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

John 12:3

Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet

*of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; **and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.***

Alabaster is a white, marble-like mineral that people used to store ointments in. While the alabaster vial remains sealed and unbroken, the contents are completely hidden, closed off from the world. When Mary broke her alabaster vial we are told that “the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” If we want our environment to be filled with the fragrance of Christ, then we too must be broken vessels.
[End Excerpt]

I recently received correspondence from another saint who has embraced a surrendered life in recent years. She was directed by the Spirit of Christ to make many radical changes to her life, and they have proven costly. Where she formerly had financial security and a settled life, she now has to look to Yahweh daily for her provision and she has moved about from place to place. Eventually the Spirit led her to move back to her hometown where her parents and family live.

In moving back this sister encountered much censure and criticism from family members who are Christians, but who have not come to the same degree of surrender to be directed by the Holy Spirit. As is the case with most Christians who are led by their soul, her family members led comfortable and outwardly successful lives. When these ones viewed her life, they saw the recent changes as being negative. She was reproached as one who is deceived, deluded, or has taken a wrong turn in life. Yahweh used the criticism and judgments of others to teach her meekness, gentleness, forgiveness and longsuffering. Rather than defend herself, she chose to bear the offenses patiently.

Many of these offenses came from her father. He expressed his concern to his daughter that she was in much error, making known his disapproval of her decisions, and the lack of wisdom in the course she had now embraced. Rather than commending her for taking up her cross to follow Christ, she was subjected to judgments that she was less spiritual than other members of the family. These criticisms hurt, for this woman loved her father and desired to have a close and loving relationship with him.

About a year ago this woman's father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, or a similar form of advanced dementia. His mental decline was very rapid and he was soon wandering off and getting lost. His mind was reduced in its capacity to reason, to argue, and to determine his own way through this life. At the same time that his mental powers were in decline a transformation began to take place in the way he related to others. The former criticism that had marked his relationship with his daughter was replaced with a spirit of love and appreciation. A sweet, simple love exuded from his innermost being as he daily interacted with her. This man remained full of love until his death some months later.

What occurred in both of these examples I have listed is that the inner nature of Christ began to be revealed through individuals whose natural powers had formerly remained unbroken. As the strength of the Adamic man was weakened, the inner life of Christ was able to come forth free of those restraints that had formerly bound it up.

The truth revealed in these things, and corroborated by the testimony of Scripture, is that the natural strengths of man are very often a hindrance to the release of the Spirit within our beings. It is necessary for every man to enter into a weak condition in a natural sense in order for the power of Christ's divine life to be revealed in and through them. The apostle Paul makes this very argument.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me - to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

People of God, consider how contradictory the attitude of Paul is with that manifested by the world and the church today. Paul said, "I will rather boast about my weaknesses." What do men boast about today? Do they not boast about their strengths? Yet, it is these very strengths that hinder growth in conformity to Christ.

Consider some of the many things men identify as their strengths today. The ability to earn a prodigious amount of money is one of man's chief strengths. Having wealth accumulated, much property, investments, and money in the bank gives a man a sense of power and achievement. Some men boast about their intellect. They may have excelled in college, or earned advanced degrees; They may be highly knowledgeable in certain fields of endeavor, or have a great capacity to reason logically, and this gives them a sense of empowerment. Other men are strong physically. They have an athleticism that gives them a sense of invulnerability, of endless strength to accomplish whatever they set their minds to do.

In every such instance where a man comes to rely in, and operate from, a position of natural strength, there always exists the potential of conflict with the spirit. When a man has found that his natural strengths have carried him far in life, he very often will judge that these same natural strengths will bring him equal success in the kingdom of God. This is great error. Whenever Yahweh sets forth to accomplish anything, it must be by the following principle:

Zechariah 4:6

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says Yahweh of hosts.

Truly, "It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing." Among the last recorded words of Christ to His disciples before He ascended are the following:

Acts 1:8

"But ***you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;*** and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Some who heard these words might have wondered, "What is wrong with the power we already have? Are not our wealth, our physical strength, and our mental powers of the soul adequate? Cannot we look to our natural strengths as we labor to be Christ's witnesses?" It was certainly the pattern of the Jews in that day to carry forth all their

religious duties through the power of the natural man, for the Spirit had not yet been given.

Sadly, even after the Spirit has been given, a majority of Christians continue to operate on the basis of a soulish power. Much service to God is performed in the power of the natural man. The soul of man is guiding and directing, and the natural powers of man that are looked to in order to accomplish every task. The results are predictable.

Men who operate out of their natural strength will fall short of the mind and will of the Father. Man's ways are not God's ways. Look at the focus the church has placed upon prosperity, wealth, and worldly success today and it is evident that the soul of man is guiding. The church is seeking to manifest an image of power, success and strength to the world. The church seeks to meet the world head on from a position of strength, yet the Son of God came in much weakness.

When men are strong in natural things, they are weak in spiritual things. This is why we find so few great people on this earth embracing the meek and lowly walk of a disciple of Christ.

I Corinthians 1:26-29

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.

I have observed in my own life that natural strength does not promote spiritual growth. In those seasons of my life when I was earning a good salary and had much money to spend, my tendency was to make decisions for myself. I felt empowered by my success, and the result was a spiritual malaise. Rather than drawing closer to God, I found that I was pressing in less to His presence.

Yahweh knows our tendency to forget Him when we are full and experiencing abundance. Therefore, He will lead His willing people through wilderness places where the abundance is gone.

Hosea 13:5-6

I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, and being satisfied, their heart became proud; Therefore they forgot Me.

If I had been a physically strong man, I am confident that this too would have been a great hindrance to my spiritual growth. Physical strength would have engendered in me a carelessness about spiritual things. Yahweh in His wisdom and mercy permitted me to be born with brittle bones. From the time of my childhood I was more easily injured than other children. I was not athletic, and this natural weakness caused me to adopt a more humble attitude toward those around me than I would have had otherwise.

One of the greatest areas of natural strength men must overcome is the power of their mind. Men are naturally prone to rely heavily upon their own ability to reason as they pursue a course through this world. As Christians, such reliance upon natural reason will stymie spiritual growth. Christians, even after they have been born of the Spirit of Christ,

still retain the ability, and tendency, to think as natural men. This tendency to operate from a natural wisdom must be cast down.

I Corinthians 3:18-19

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God.

What does Paul mean when he says we “must become foolish”? The natural man esteems things that God does not. Look at the world around you. Look at what is promoted on television and in all forms of media. A pursuit of material abundance is one of the chief tenets of worldly wisdom. Try to get as much of this world as you can. Seek a comfortable life. Enjoy as much pleasure as possible. Pursue popularity. Live large. Be filled and happy. This is the wisdom of the world. Yet the wisdom of Christ speaks in this way:

Luke 6:20-26

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."

The wisdom of God esteems that which the natural man despises. The natural man seeks to walk in strength. The spiritual man boasts in his weakness, for then the power of Christ can be revealed in him. There are a multitude of ways in which Yahweh can bring His sons and daughters to experience this necessary sense of weakness. In the passage we previously looked at from the apostle Paul, he was writing about a thorn in the flesh. This thorn was some type of physical affliction that was very humbling. Yet, Paul acknowledged that there were other things Yahweh brought into his life, and ours, to produce in us this same sense of natural weakness so that we would look to the power of Yahweh to sustain us.

“Therefore I am well content ***with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties***, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Has Yahweh brought you to a place where you are insulted and reproached? Does this not cause you to perceive your vulnerable position in this world? Those who are popular feel empowered by their popularity, yet those who are insulted are weak by comparison.

Have you been brought to experience various distresses? Perhaps you have distressing circumstances in your finances. Maybe the distress is in learning of some serious medical problem you are facing. Whatever the experience, distresses come into our lives to help

break down the natural man so that the life of Christ can be revealed in us.

Are you persecuted for your obedience to Christ? It is certainly difficult to find that the Christian religious system holds you in contempt, or has declared you to be deluded and a heretic. When ministers close the doors of their churches in your face, and you find you have no place among them, there is a sense of being alone in this world. This isolation drives us closer to our heavenly Father. The same is true when we face persecution from the world, from governments, and the courts of the land.

Paul said he had learned to be content with *difficulties*. All disciples of Christ will be led into difficulties. Yahshua said that there is an afflicted path that leads to life. His invitation is to take up your cross and follow Him. All of these experiences are designed to provide us with a favorable environment for spiritual growth. We grow best when our lives are difficult.

Consider now why Christ told those who would be His disciples that they must give up all they possess. Our possessions give us a sense of security, of strength. How many people wrap their homes, cars, and possessions around themselves as a security blanket? These worldly possessions enable them to feel comfortable and protected. Yet, what man needs to grow spiritually is a sense of his vulnerability in this world. When we are weak we look to God constantly. When we are weak we are cognizant of our need for God to come through for us each and every day, lest we be overcome and perish. When we are weak we look to God to perform that which we cannot accomplish in our natural strength. When we are weak we trust in God's thoughts more than our own. Therefore, God chooses for His children to experience much weakness in this world.

When a man or woman comes to Christ they must lay aside the natural order of their former life. Whereas they previously sought to live life from a position of strength, they must now embrace weakness. Rather than relying upon their natural abilities to carry them through life, they must now look to the Spirit of Christ to direct their steps and empower them for every task.

Because natural strength is such a detriment to spiritual growth, Christ will ALWAYS lead His disciples to experience much weakness in this life. We often read or hear about in the news of some young person who has had much fame and fortune at an early age. These ones have been overcome by their natural appetites and sinful impulses. They have fallen into a lifestyle of sexual immorality, of illegal drug use, or drunkenness, or even theft. Has not the church fallen into deception when they would desire to have the same wealth, affluence and popularity as these ones who have made shipwreck of their lives? I thank God that He has chosen for me an afflicted path, for had I the experience of many of these young movie stars and singers I would surely have strayed far from the path of life and lost all thought of God.

When you and I surrender our lives to be led of the Spirit in all things, Christ will upset the normal course of our lives. In some way, indeed in many ways, Yahshua will produce weakness in a man or woman. Some who were formerly financially secure will find themselves emptied of worldly possessions and wealth. Some who were physically strong will find themselves made weak. Some who were accounted as wise in this world will be brought into circumstances where they are judged to be fools. As we follow Christ we will find that weakness becomes our companion.

Weakness produces for men and women the proper environment for spiritual growth. The fruits of the Spirit grow abundantly in the fertile soil of an Adamic life that has been brought to poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of

heaven.”

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control...

Does not weakness act as a catalyst in the promotion of these spiritual fruit? Do you not find it easier to act and speak in a patient, kind, and humble manner when you are approaching others from a position of weakness, rather than strength? Are not the rich prone to pride and haughtiness? Are not the strong tempted to bully those weaker than themselves? Yahweh will abase His sons and daughters that they might find it easier to manifest the fruits of the Spirit.

Considering these things, we should think it not strange that in yielding our lives to Christ to follow wherever He would lead that we are soon brought to poverty, illness, injury, weakness, or reproach in this world. Christ existed in the form of God. He had great power, glory and authority in the heavens. Yet He became weak to prove the excellency of the power of God in mankind. Yahshua knew hunger, poverty, reproach, and the injury of the cross. Yet as He accepted these things He showed forth the power of love, peace, patience, humility and every other divine attribute of the Father.

II Corinthians 13:4

For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.

Surrender your life to Christ to be directed by Him and you too will be brought to weakness that you might find the power of God revealed in you. This is a principle of the kingdom of God.



Suffering as True Worship

I can think of no better way to end this series on suffering and discipleship than to reveal the relationship between suffering and the worship of Yahweh. As with many of the church's teachings in this hour, truth has fallen by the wayside. It is needful at this hour to re-establish the critical link between suffering and the worship of Yahweh.

I was visiting with a brother in Christ this past week when our conversation turned to the subject of worship. He shared with me that he had recently completed a study on the subject of worship and he uncovered a very important fact. The very first mention of worship in the Bible describes an act of profound sacrifice and suffering. When Abraham is taking his son Isaac up to the mount to offer him up as a sacrifice to Yahweh, he refers to this act as worship.

Genesis 22:3-5

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will **worship** and return to you."

The first mention of anything in the Bible is very significant. The meaning of a thing is often found in first occurrences. As we examine this passage we find that Abraham had a very different concept of worship than that which the church has in this hour.

I have often pondered this experience of Abraham, and I think it would be well for all saints to spend much time considering it. There was no act of man found anywhere in the Old Testament that was more pleasing to Yahweh than this costly obedience of Abraham, the friend of God.

Genesis 22:15-18

Then the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

It is difficult to imagine the pain and conflict that was present in the soul of Abraham as he journeyed for three days on his way to the mountain to slay his beloved son. Surely this must have been Abraham's Gethsemane moment where his soul was crushed as unto death.

I believe that during the three days Abraham journeyed to the mount he experienced great wrestling in his soul. It was possible that he could turn back and follow the counsel of his own soul rather than heeding the command of Yahweh. Yet, after three days of wrestling, and not shrinking back, Abraham laid the matter to rest. The will of God must be done no matter the cost. I believe the moment of Abraham's victory is revealed in a small, often overlooked detail that serves as a parable of what has transpired. In the passage

above we hear Abraham's first utterance in this experience.

Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."

There are no details of God's word that are without significance. Yahweh does not waste words. Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey." The donkey is a symbol of the stubborn and rebellious soul of man. Abraham at this point was freed of the donkey. It had been firmly resolved in his heart that he would carry through with that which Yahweh required of him. This resolution was spoken forth, "I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you." The matter was settled. The cross had been embraced. Now there was a perfect yielding to the will of the Father.

Abraham trusted Yahweh who years earlier had promised to bless Isaac. Abraham fully anticipated having to slay his son, but he believed also that Yahweh would have to raise Isaac up from the dead, for Yahweh's promises could not fail.

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

Consider for a moment the attitude and actions of Abraham at this time. I do not believe that Abraham was marching along rejoicing aloud about the goodness of God. He was not singing loud praises to the God of heaven. The church associates worship with such things today, yet the first pure act of worship to Yahweh mentioned in Scriptures was not attended with these things. I believe Abraham was walking along quietly, speaking very little, as his soul was full of the contemplation of what he must do. The following verse gives a clue to Abraham's silent introspection.

Genesis 22:7-8

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

In these words we read of Isaac and Abraham walking silently together. A question is burning in Isaac's heart. Isaac begins by getting his father's attention. He says, "My father!" Abraham responds "Here I am my son." Abraham likely seemed far away, lost in his thoughts. He was full of the pain that arose at the thought of slaying his beloved son whom he loved so much. As Isaac speaks Abraham responds tenderly, assuring him that he is present with him in both body and thought.

Examining this experience reveals that worship does not necessarily involve the tongue of man. Worship is not simply something we speak forth. True worship is much more profound. It involves the very depths of a man's soul. Worship is revealed in both faith and obedience.

Hebrews 11:17

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...

It requires confidence in the faithfulness of Yahweh for a man to obey God when He directs him to some painful course that involves sacrifice and sorrow. A man must believe that Yahweh has his best interests at heart and will cause all things to work together for good. Though Yahweh should lead the man down an afflicted path, the man must trust the One who is guiding him, believing that God has all wisdom and power, and is motivated by a perfect love.

There is no more profound act of worship than for a man to demonstrate great confidence in the goodness and faithfulness of Yahweh. Yahweh is pleased by man's trust in Him.

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

The apostle Peter came to understand the value Yahweh places upon the faith of His saints. He wrote:

I Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yahshua Christ...

Peter speaks here of "the proof of your faith." In the churches there are many songs sung where people declare their faith and trust in Yahweh. There are also many sermons given and confessions uttered whereby men and women declare their trust in God. Words, however, are not proof. A man can speak forth things which are not reality in his life. Let the man be tested to an extreme degree; let his own life, or the life of those he loves be put on the line, then it will be proven whether he truly has faith in Yahweh.

Peter states that the proof of our faith is "more precious than gold which is perishable." To whom is man's faith precious? Is it not Yahweh that Peter has in mind? Yahweh finds faith to be an exceedingly valuable thing. As Paul said, "without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith, an active and practical trust in the goodness and trustworthiness of God, is an exceedingly precious thing in the eyes of Yahweh.

Peter compares faith to gold. Gold is valuable for many reasons. Perhaps the greatest driver of the value of gold is its scarceness. If gold were as common as coal that is mined by the train loads its value would not be much. Faith is similar to gold in this aspect. Faith is uncommon. How many men in Abraham's day would have manifested the faith of that man? How many men today have this kind of faith?

Peter also mentions that gold must be refined by fire. Our faith is proven and made pure through fiery trials as we set our hope and trust in God. The outcome of proven faith is "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Yahshua Christ." Will not Yahweh prove the character of every son's faith? Will He not subject all to trials as He did Abraham that His sons might have an opportunity to worship Him and obtain praise and glory and honor?

People of God, true worship is not proven by what we say, or sing aloud as praise unto Yahweh. True worship is proven as we follow Yahweh obediently down an afflicted and distressing path that He asks us to walk. Do you want to worship God and Christ? Then accept the invitation of Yahshua to “Come, take up your cross, and follow Me.” This is worship.

We can find this definition of worship confirmed by the apostle Paul in the New Testament. Please consider carefully what is being expressed in the following verse.

Romans 12:1

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of **worship**.

I have often made reference to this verse as I have shared with the saints the cost of discipleship. I have asked them, “What is a sacrifice? Is it not flesh that is laid upon an altar for the fire to consume it?” This is what Yahweh requires of His sons and daughters. He entreats us to yield our lives to Him. As we do, He will direct us to a sacrificial life where we encounter many fiery trials. The goal of these experiences is to reduce our flesh that a spiritual creation might arise. Paul declares that those who present themselves as a “living sacrifice” are offering to God true worship. As the smoke of the freewill offering ascended, it was as a fragrant aroma in the nostrils of God. So too do our lives become a sweet savor unto Yahweh when we freely yield them, and accept those fiery trials prepared for us.

I have often read invitations on church signs that said something like, “Come join us for worship.” Yet, what these churches are offering is an invitation to come and sing songs along with a praise band or choir. They may liven things up by having banners for people to wave, or dancers to accompany the songs being sung. Are these same ones yielding their lives to go wherever Christ would lead them? Have these ones found that afflicted path that leads to life, or are they pursuing prosperity, ease, comfort and those things that the soul of man desires?

There is much play acting that takes place in the churches today. Week after week Christians gather to proclaim their love of God, but their lives reveal that they love themselves more. The heart of man is prone to self-deception.

Matthew 15:7-8

“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.”

The word hypocrite means “play actor.” It is derived from a theatrical term in the Greek language. Tragically, the church has adopted a pattern of showing up on Sundays to play a part in a group drama. All those gathered together appear to be great worshipers of Yahweh and His Son. Yet the truth is “proven” by what they do outside the doors of the church. Have they accepted the call to Christian discipleship? Are they yielding their lives to follow Christ? Are they bearing their cross? Are they content with suffering, reproaches, persecution, rejection, loss and sorrow? Has the church embraced the “first things” that John wrote about in the book of Revelation?

In this hour the Spirit of Christ is inviting many to embrace a radically different life than they would choose for themselves. As Yahweh did with His friend Abraham, He is

directing His people to a sacrificial life where they must lay all they love, including their own lives, on the altar. Christ said:

Luke 14:26-27

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Do you want to worship God? Accept the invitation of Christ to be His disciple. Prove your faith by surrendering your life to Him. That which Yahweh esteems is costly. Christ would urge all who would be His disciples to “count the cost.” If you will count the cost of being a disciple of Christ, and accept it, Yahweh will truly be honored, and in that final day it will result in praise and glory and honor that far surpasses every pain and sacrifice.

May you be blessed with peace and understanding in these days!

