

Navigating Our Present Distress

As much as we would like to bypass our adverse circumstances with their grief and sorrows, perhaps it is time that we learned how to look at the dark storm clouds in our life with an awareness that therein are living waters for the soul. Though we prefer blue skies and sunny days, what measure of growth and fruitfulness might we behold if there were no earth soaking storms?

Job 14:1 says, "Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble." This was not by our creators' original design, for in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were born unto endless days and no troubles. Would it not be fair to say that troubles are the fruit of God's curse on mankind and the earth? Could we not go a step further and say that the source of all our troubles could be attributed to Adam and Eve, and let us not forget the serpent of deceit.

Is it not a strange matter and sadly ironic that our Creator God is so often blamed and is the target of so much anger and bitterness when trouble comes into believers and non believers lives? " This Almighty God not only created mankind with a perfect and innocent nature, but also surrounded them with a magnificently beautiful universe, free of the curse of sin, which brought with it disease and death. This same Creator and Almighty God several thousand years later came down to this earth and its' inhabitants that he created and took upon himself the form of a servant in the likeness of man, as we find in Philippians 2:7. The following verse tells us that he chose to humble himself (having been in the form of God Vs.6) and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Only the perfect sinless God man could qualify to become the redeemer and savior of his created beings. It was an established divine law at the very beginning of creation that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission or forgiveness of sin, thus he chose to be obedient unto the death of the cross.

Acts 4:12 says of our Creator turned Savior, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is NONE OTHER NAME under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Is it not most reasonable that the name Buddha or Mohammed, or any other religious leader under heaven could not provide mankind's salvation, considering that the price of our salvation was the blood of the perfect sinless Creator and God man? All other religious leaders or icons of worship were not only created beings, subject to their creator, but were sinful men that needed the salvation offered by their Creator turned Savior.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The same Creator God that created and loved Adam and Eve came down to his sons of creation to redeem those that would believe in him and accept him.

John 1:12 says, But as many as received him, TO THEM gave he power to become the SONS OF GOD, even to them that believe on his name. Jesus Christ our Creator and Savior made it possible for the sons of creation to become sons of God.

Now I say all that, to say this, have we seen anything at all in this most beautiful of all love stories, that would give us any reason at all to strike out at this sacrificial God man that laid down his life to become our redeemer? When a young child dies a horrible death from a car wreck or some terminal disease, are there really any grounds at all for blaming God the Father or Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Does it make any sense at all to accuse God of lacking concern and care and love when a loved one dies at the senselessness of a drunk driver?

Man that is born of woman is of few days and FULL OF TROUBLES! We could go on and on with this list of questions of a variety of sad and heart wrenching scenarios, but the real senselessness is the unfounded thoughts of accusing our loving God of having a part in it, or not having a part in it, when we supposedly assume, that he should have had a part in it.

Let it be clearly understood that man was not of few days and full of troubles until he chose to disobey the words of his Creator and disregard his amazing love that made them perfect creatures in a perfect environment. It was man's rebellion and sin that caused the curse, and the curse that brought forth disease and death in a myriad of forms. It is that same rebellious and sinful nature that causes man to strike out at the very lover of their souls when their present distress befalls them.

Why Do We Blame God?

At any given moment, every believer is either walking in the flesh with a carnal mind, or they are walking in the Spirit with a spiritual mind.

Rm.8:5-7 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the

carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Take careful note of the words “the carnal mind is enmity against God”. First of all, let us confirm in our understanding, based on the authority of God’s word, that when we are walking in or after the flesh, we have a fleshly or carnal mind. We are told that this mind is against God and is not subject, not only to the God of the law, but to the law of God or his written word. Perhaps the key to why we blame and strike out at God in our sufferings is found in the word “enmity”. The idea behind this word is ‘hostile opposition’. It implies that a carnal minds’ approach to God is that of an enemy.

These truths should help us to understand why we strike out against God as though he was our enemy when life seems to be coming unglued. Keep in mind that this is the natural response of the natural or carnal man. The heart of the carnal man follows suit with the carnal mind verified by Jeremiah in 17:9 where he says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? This should give some clarity as to what motivates a carnal believer to totally disregard his Creator and Savior, and indeed disgrace him at times when beset by fiery trials of his faith.

So how do we protect ourselves from these disgraceful reactions that breed anger and bitterness against God in times of adversity and pain and sorrow? Our second option and preferred graceful reaction in these circumstances is to respond in the Spirit.

Navigating Our Present Distress In The Spirit

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire wanting nothing. The word “temptations” is, by definition, a testing or proving the genuineness or quality of. Verse three reveals that it is a trying of our faith. The word “trying” in verse 3 means testing the trustworthiness of. So, the concept here is that our professed faith in any given circumstance is going to go on trial, and its genuineness and spiritual validity will be tried by our response to our circumstances. So, we are walking along, assuming we are proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, and we encounter hurdles and obstacles on our path of life, which according to Pro. 4:18, “is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”. Remembering that we are walking obediently in the Spirit,

under the control of the Spirit of Christ, with what spirit will we engage these adverse and difficult situations? Will we react with the spirit of man or the Spirit of God? Who cares? Is it that crucial?

Perhaps the answer to this question could be found in a question. How much do we value our fellowship and relationship with our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ? How important is it to us that we are walking faithfully on the path of the just as a light that shineth more and more, not less and less, unto the perfect day of the coming of Jesus Christ, in which we are to be found blameless?

Though most suffering and adversity is the result of the curse, and the cursed nature of man, the silver lining on the dark clouds of adversity and hardship is the opportunity afforded to us in reaping the rich benefits of responding to our afflictions under the control of the Spirit, rather than under the control of the flesh or spirit of man.

In these three verses, there are two of the ninefold fruit of the Spirit. This reveals that our Lord's desired assumption is that his child will react humbly and obediently, with a sincere spirit of submission to the Lord, which will be manifested in our submission to uncomfortable and distressing hardships. This reaction exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit, 'meekness', which characterized our saviors' response and reaction to all his sufferings and mental and physical afflictions. Is it truly our desire to be conformed to the image of Christ, or do we simply mouth the words? What words come out of our mouths when we experience any form of discomfort and circumstances that cramp or restrict our will, and how we think life should play out at any given moment?

Rather than moaning and groaning, whining, and singing the somebody done me wrong song, and let us not forget the abandonment of the fruit of the Spirit, 'temperance', when we throw a temper tantrum, is it really unthinkable or unreasonable to do it God's way, and count it all joy? I don't know if our God ever thinks about sticking a spiritual pacifier in our mouth and telling us to grow up, but we will find in this passage that he expresses his desire for us to grow up spiritually. A refusal to obey God's word always causes us to digress in our spiritual growth.

The manner in which God says, "count it all joy" is similar to our earthly father telling us to brush our teeth or take a bath. In his mind, this response is a given. It is a natural function of a believer that is walking under the control of the Spirit of Christ, and in submission to the word of God, to react or behave in this manner. It is only appropriate.

God also seems to presume that there is a 'faith' to be tried, as we see in the words, "the trying of your FAITH". It is of foundational importance to understand that God knew when he inspired this writing that faith was one product of the ninefold fruit of the Spirit. Product? A product is that which is produced. When we are in the Spirit, all nine products of the ninefold fruit of the Spirit are produced in us by the Spirit of Christ. This amazing truth presents a question that begs to be answered, and that is, how many believers are struggling to live the Christian life by a self-produced faith that never seems to be enough, and never produces any power, peace, or joy. Perhaps worst of all is that it never produces a victorious life. We see then that God did NOT present this passage to his children with the assumption that they were walking in the flesh, BUT IN THE SPIRIT. He knew that the carnal mind and heart were not capable of producing this fruit of the Spirit.

Furthermore, he also knew when he said "count it all joy", that 'joy' was also a fruit of the Spirit, provided as standard equipment to Spirit filled believers. God knew when he said "count it all joy" and "let patience have her perfect work" that his admonition would have been of no avail to his children that had chosen to walk in the flesh with a carnal mind. God said in Rm.8:7 that the carnal mind is not capable, or has no capacity that would enable it to be willing to subject itself to the authority and control of the Spirit and God's word. The carnally minded believer has no appetite or aptitude for receiving the word due to his inherit rebellious nature, as opposed to the submissive spirit which is both willing and desirous to place itself under the authority of the word, as well as the Spirit.

When adversity and any form of hardship comes into a carnal believers' life, their inborn hostility toward God and his word causes them to blame God for the circumstances and the ensuing suffering and grief. A Spirit led believers' first reaction to divers temptations should be to count it all joy and let patience have her perfect work. A carnal believers' first reaction is one of impatience, mixed with murmuring and complaining, while by nature, wanting to blame someone. Do you have any clue yet who that might be?

Unfortunately, though we have thoughts of vilifying these self-loving and self-pleasing carnal believers, all of us at some moment of the day, and maybe many moments of the day, will find ourselves yielding our members as instruments of unrighteousness and putting off the new man which is the Spirit of Christ in us.

Patience is a virtue to those that are seeking to learn to walk consistently in the Spirit, while it is a villain to those who choose to live the self-life. The self-life wants its' way and no other way, when it wants it and no other time. The villainous nature of patience to the old man is found in the Websters'

definition for patience, which reads this way, The will or ability to wait or endure without complaint; Bearing or enduring pain or trouble without complaining, losing self-control or making a disturbance. Does this not condemn the nature of our old man and exalt the virtues of the new creature in Christ? The new man is in Christ and Christ is in the new man moment by moment through his Spirit. Through the fruit of the Spirit of Christ called 'temperance', we can experience and enjoy a second generation fruit of the Spirit, called patience. How so?

Let us closely examine an expanded definition of the word temperance to make a good judgment call as to whether 'temperance' bears enough character traits to give credibility to the possibility that 'temperance' could father this second generation fruit, or virtue called 'patience'.

Father Temperance carries the very basic idea of Spirit control of one's temper. It is a restraining of ones' conduct or behavior to include ones' frame of mind or mood, as well as ones' outward expressions and carnal appetites. Lastly, it is a controlling of ones' temper in regard to anger and its' frustrations, both inwardly and outwardly.

Isn't it possible that temperance could have fathered patience? When "divers' or many and varied temptations of adversity and multiple hardships beset us, does our frame of mind and our mood, or spirit change? Does this change manifest itself in outward expressions of frustration and anger to varying degrees? Wasn't the definition of patience something like having the ability to wait and endure without complaint or making a disturbance, or losing self-control?

Could it be that God is saying, that when we fall into divers temptations, he wants us to be enabled through the work and word of the Spirit to respond as fully matured spiritual adults, and not as spiritually immature babies that had their pacifier taken away from them, whining and crying and throwing a temper tantrum? By the way, how do we respond and react?

God said in James 1:4, "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." God would not have told a carnal believer to do this knowing that he had no spiritual capacity to obey it, or to receive its' stated benefit. He is basically saying that letting patience have her perfect work will enable you to continue growing and maturing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The words, "perfect and entire" imply being furnished with spiritually maturity and integrity.

II Tim.3:17 says, "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." God reveals to us in II Tim. 3:16-17 that our

knowledge and spiritual understanding of the scriptures, when applied and practiced, is capable of fully equipping us to achieve full spiritual maturity and to accomplish all the good works that we are called to do.

Our Present Distress Demands the Sentence Of Death

The well kept secret to responding to the trying of our faith in the Spirit is found in II Cor.1:8-9 in these words, "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

But we had the SENTENCE OF DEATH in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that raiseth the dead:". Here we have a life changing spiritual secret uncovered!

While the term "raiseth the dead" may be talking about the physical resurrection of the dead, let us use the interpretive tool, of cross referencing, to go over to Eph.5:14, where we find these words, "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and ARISE FROM THE DEAD, and Christ shall give thee light."

What we find here is a spiritual resurrection from a spiritual death and spiritual darkness. God is telling these Ephesian believers that they are in need of a spiritual awakening or a spiritual resurrection from their spiritual death. God's stated promise in the words, "Christ SHALL GIVE THEE LIGHT", was that if they would surrender to the working of Holy Spirit conviction, through contrition and the humbling of their spirit, they would be enabled by God's mercy and grace to arise from the dead and receive the promise of Christ's light, or his resurrection life.

It is crucial and vitally important to comprehend with Holy Spirit imparted understanding that what is happening here behind the scenes is the secret to having the SENTENCE OF DEATH in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in him that raiseth the dead. There seems to be considerable scriptural credibility that this resurrection is a spiritual resurrection that produces an awakening unto the resurrection life of Christ. It is here that we put off the old man that we were sleeping in, and put on the new man, which is Christ in us, that we are awakened, and resurrected in, and unto. Through this SENTENCE OF DEATH, (of the old man) we no longer trust in ourselves and lean unto our own understanding, but we trust in God with a faith that is produced in those that put on the new man and walk in the Spirit.

This humble state of lowliness is always followed by grace according to James 4:6 and I Pet. 5:5. It is through this gift of grace that God supplies all his divine resources needed to walk and serve God. It is this same grace, sometimes called suffering grace, that our Lord gives freely, to sustain us in all manner and degree of fiery trials of our faith.

II Cor.4:8-9 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

Let it be clearly understood, with ample scriptural authority, that if we, in a state of Spirit humbled lowliness, were to encounter and spiritually engage ALL of the adversity in these two verses, we could still count it all joy if we were walking in the Spirit with the sentence of death in ourselves.

II Cor.4:10-11 says, "ALWAYS bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest IN OUR BODY. For we which live are ALWAYS delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest IN OUR MORTAL FLESH.

In this classic and beautifully worded passage on adversity and suffering, yea, multiplied hardships nigh unto despairing of life itself, we find God's miraculous antidote to the poisoning of our spirit by our toxic carnal responses to mental, spiritual, and even physical afflictions.

The antidote is, "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus". So how do we do that one might ask? The answer is by "always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake." Though both of these statements are true and factual, they might be more clearly understood by Paul's statement in I Cor.1:9 where he said, "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves".

Remember that the sentence of death is putting off the old man(DYING TO) that allows us to identify with the dying of the Lord Jesus, followed by putting on the new man which is putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection life. It seems that when we put off the old man, his dying allows us not only to bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, but to live the resurrection life of Christ, as he lives through us in his Spirit. We find this reward of the sentence of death in these words in verse 10, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in OUR BODY. We find the same reward in verse 11 in these words, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in OUR MORTAL FLESH."

The bottom line is that if we have the sentence of death in us, the old man is dead, allowing the new man, through the Spirit of Christ to respond to

all suffering and adversity. Two manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit that we need in these times of the trying of our faith are joy and peace, produced in us even in the midst of our worst storms.

This rich and rewarding life, as well as our antidote to carnal responses to trials, could be called 'The Crucified Life', or should we call it the 'Resurrected Life'? Call it what you will, to live with it is a life of continual spiritual enrichment, whereas to live without it is a life of continual spiritual poverty.

Gal.2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Would it not be wonderful if the next time we have the opportunity to give a testimony of praise, we could stand up and quote this verse, stressing how each word and phrase describes the quality of life we are presently living? Should not this be every believer's goal and vision?

Habakkuk 2:2 says, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it."

II Cor.3:1-2 says, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart."

Would it not be Christ honoring and God glorifying to allow the Spirit of God and of Christ to write the vision and goal of living the crucified life upon our hearts with indelible ink, or better yet, by the Spirit of the living God? In the context of what we are studying, we would be asking our Father to write our vision or goal of living the crucified or resurrection life of Christ on the tables or tablets of our hearts. We would be urgently imploring him to make our vision plain that other men can see Christ in us as we live our crucified resurrection life in their sight.

Note of Interest: The term "make it plain" carries the idea of removing any obstructions or distractions from our life that would keep those around us from viewing Christ in us, the hope of glory. Also, we see in the words "that he may run that readeth it", that our lives truly can become written epistles of Christ, known and read of all men. As they read such powerfully and beautifully written epistles, our light which is the light of Christ, shines into their souls and challenges and motivates them to run the race that is set before them.

A TRANSFORMED VISION that leads to a TRANSFORMED OUTLOOK

When we allow our Lord to write this VISION OF TRANSFORMATION into our hearts, of living the crucified resurrection life of Christ, scales of carnality and spiritual blindness will fall from our eyes and we will view our present distress from God's heavenly perspective. We will recognize and discover that divers temptations, along with the suffering and adversity that accompany them, are opportunities to not only grow in God's supplied grace, but that our spiritual response of counting it all joy will glorify God. When those around us read us as epistles of Christ, when our life seems to be crumbling around us, what do they read? Is God glorified? Are men reading an epistle that is the story of a crucified life that is a divine standard of excellence, both rich and rewarding, and manifested by a spirit of joy?

With the scales gone. and having acquired a supernatural vision and a reality of Christ living his resurrection life through us, by his own faith, our view of our present distress also becomes supernatural. Paul said they were troubled on EVERY side, perplexed (mental torment), persecuted (including physical torment), and cast down nigh unto being destroyed, YET, in II Cor. 4:16 he called all this suffering "OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION".

My friend, this is none other than a supernatural perspective and power! Is it not also supernatural for Jesus Christ to live his life through us? When we choose to put on Jesus Christ at the I Jn. 1:9 blood gate by putting off the old man, we are endued with a supernatural power and a supernatural nature that is fully capable of a supernatural perspective regarding our life's hardships. God's standard of excellence is the richly rewarding Crucified Life.

II Cor.4:15 says, "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God."

"All things" refers to all the divers troubles mentioned in verses 8-9. Pay close attention to the words "for your sakes". These words speak volumes, but we will simply focus on these words as being valid evidence that Paul was living a selfless life, where his fleshly desires were crucified. He had taken up his cross of crucifixion and was giving his life, not only for Christ, but for the saints.

When the Corinthians read the epistle of Christ written by the Spirit of God in Paul's life, they read about the love of Christ that enabled him to lay down his life for others. They read of a supernatural selfless love. Paul was saying that we suffered all of this for your spiritual benefit and God's glory.

Paul was also saying that God's abundant supply of suffering grace enabled them to respond in such a way that God received much praise and glory among the saints. May our Lord help us to understand that there are those all around us observing and reading our lives. God's suffering grace is limitless and fully available to those saints that will allow him to navigate them through their present distress, no matter how small or how overwhelming. The only requirement is that we must negotiate all obstacles and hurdles in a Spirit produced response of humility and selflessness.

God's Glorification vs. Self's Gratification

We have seen in II Cor.4:10-11 a portrait in high definition imaging of what the sentence of death and the crucified life looks like. We have seen as well, what could be considered the center stage truths of not only personal sanctification through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, but personal magnification of Jesus Christ as our only source of true life, and that being the resurrection life of Jesus Christ lived through us.

In the midst of these soul thrilling truths from God's treasure chest, we do not want to miss the divinely ordained purpose and intended function of the crucified resurrection life, and that being to bring glory to God the Father. Jesus Christ has always been and will always be about bringing glory to his Father. If the life that we now live is by the faith and the person of Jesus Christ, our pursuit of God's glory should be with the passion of Jesus Christ himself.

II Cor.4:15-16 says, "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to THE GLORY OF GOD. For which CAUSE we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

It seems quite evident based on the authority of this verse that the ordained purpose and intended function of the crucified resurrection life is for the greater CAUSE of THE GLORY OF GOD. Perhaps in this holy of holies moment of truth, we can understand why self glorification is the archenemy

of this great cause, and such a deadly poison to the resurrection life of Christ.

In the words "For which cause we faint not;", Paul is telling us that fainting or becoming weak and weary hearted is not an option in the defense of the supreme cause of the glory of God. Would to the God of Glory that we felt that way! We find in the words "though our outward man perish, yet is the inward man renewed day by day", the premium value Paul placed on the crucified life which brings glory to God. He seems to be saying by way of the definition of the word "perish", that though his body come to ruin, and slowly be destroyed by troubles and persecutions, he is willing to make this sacrifice to have the inward or new man continually renewed day by day unto God's glory. Is it not God's will that we do the same?

II Cor.4:17-18 says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

What we behold in these closing verses of our study could be categorized as, last but not least! We find in these verses the TRANSFORMED OUTLOOK of the crucified resurrection life. From this high and lofty height, we not only enjoy the privilege of enjoying the mountain top resurrection life of our Lord, but we are allowed to see through our Father's eyes how he views his children's ever present distresses on earth.

Take careful note that he weighs in our afflictions on the same scales that he weighs in our glory. The final 'weigh in' shows our afflictions LIGHT in comparison to a "far more exceeding and ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY". Furthermore, our afflictions are deemed MOMENTARY while our glory seems to be set forth as being ETERNAL.

Let us be greatly challenged and even encouraged unto a GREAT HOPE of GREAT GLORY, knowing that IF we will learn to change our outlook on our afflictions and LOOK NOT at the things that are SEEN, but at the GLORY that is not seen, then we will be ENABLED by the CHRIST of the CRUCIFIED

RESURRECTION LIFE to glorify our Father, even in the midst of fiery trials and troubles.

In closing, let us take one more close look at the words of II Cor.4:17 which reads, "For our light affliction which is but for a moment, WORKETH FOR US a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory".

May we see and feel the heart of God and his manifested love for his children in the midst of our afflictions. Our Father is not making light of our suffering anguish with its' pain and sorrow that the trying of our faith brings. Neither is he simply demanding a right and spiritual response that he might be glorified. Always remember that our Father is for us! Note in the words, "Worketh for us" that he is working for us! He is cheering us on and pouring in ample suffering grace for the cause our glorification! He is working for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, not only so that we can live a glorious life now, but for eternity as well.

