

The Gift of Suffering

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

Suffering, a gift? Yes, not only a gift, but a gracious gift. The Greek verb is from **CHARISMA**, which means “a gift of grace.” To most of us suffering is a wretched thing, the sooner rid of the better. It is an interruption to our joy and peace. It causes us to question God and our faith. It is, in fact, the reason why some hesitate to accept Christ in the first place. But these attitudes come from a lack of understanding of what suffering really means.

The Greek word, **PASCHO**, means basically, “to feel.” When God allows suffering in our lives He stirs the deep chords of “sensitivity.” He breaks through the hard crust of self centeredness and makes us tender toward others. Paul says that we are comforted by God in our sufferings so that we may comfort others. (*II Corinthians 1:3-7*)

This, of course, is true, if we receive the suffering as a gift of God. The Holy Spirit then becomes the catalyst, turning the pain into an agent of growth and blessing.

Suffering has many purposes—all of them aimed at the ultimate perfecting of our souls. We have spoken of the process whereby suffering makes us tender toward others and enables us to bring comfort. It also teaches obedience. Even of Christ it is said, ***“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.”*** (*Hebrews 5:8*)

Peter says that ***“Christ suffered for us leaving us an example that ye should follow in His steps.”*** (*I Peter 2:21*)

Sometimes life is very, very hard. Even Paul said that at times he was so pressed down as to despair even of life. This life is surely a vale of tears and sometimes the grief goes deeper than tears. But remember that God is at home with broken hearts. Psalms 147:3—***“He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.”***

In fact, it seems that we never really get close to the Lord until our heart gets crushed a little. David says, ***“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”*** (*Psalms 51:17*)

It is not easy. It is a natural thing to shrink from suffering. But this is reality. God cannot build your soul without the chisel and the hammer and the fire. Stay with Him in it. As you find yourself gaining strength you will be glad, and you will be a blessing to others as well. More and more you will find that life has substance to it and is not a frothy, shallow thing.

“But the God of all grace, who has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, settle you.” (*I Peter 5:10*)