

Destined to Suffer for Christ's Sake

"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Philippians 1:29 "For you yourselves know that we have been destined for this... we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction." 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4

Many Christians believe God is infinitely happy and that He also wants us to be happy. They believe the idea of sorrow and suffering is negative thinking and should be avoided. This is a false gospel. It ignores the whole counsel of God as revealed by His Word. Many people mistakenly believe that the pursuit of happiness is our God-given right. However, this directly contradicts the Bible, which declares the pursuit of holiness is our God-given obligation. Multitudes are now reaping the godless fruit of pursuing temporal, earthly happiness instead of the righteousness of God that comes by faith and the church has been compromised by buying into this false gospel. The Bible is also clear we cannot pursue the holiness of God without suffering here on earth. In contrast to the false gospel of happiness, the Bible says Christ was "a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3)." Even though He was the Son of God, God perfected Jesus as the Son of Man, the author of our salvation, through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10; also 5:8)." Jesus Himself said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things (Mark 8:31)."

Jesus Christ could not have redeemed His bride without suffering, even to the point of suffering death on the cross. Similarly, the bride of Christ cannot be prepared for eternal union and co-rulership with Christ without also suffering. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12)." Jesus told His disciples they could expect to drink from His cup of suffering (Matthew 20:22-23). The apostle Peter said, "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 (1 Peter 2:21)." The apostle Paul said, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22)." This suffering refers not to our initial salvation but to our sanctification and spiritual maturity. We are destined to suffer because we cannot possess our spiritual inheritance in Christ if we don't suffer for Christ's sake (Romans 8:17).

Suffering is inseparably linked with knowing Jesus Christ. Paul said, "I want to know Christ... and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings (Philippians 3:10)." We cannot resist sin and the carnal desires of our soul-life without suffering emotionally and physically. "Therefore since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of his time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2)." We cannot be God's legitimate sons if we are not willing to suffer the pain of His divine discipline (Hebrews 12:5-10). We cannot bear God's spiritual fruit if we are not willing to suffer the pain of His divine pruning (John 15:2). We cannot be Christ's soldiers if we are not willing to suffer hardship (2 Timothy 2:3). We are destined to suffer for Christ's sake because suffering produces Christian character and spiritual maturity (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4). Therefore, when we ask God to help us grow in Christ, we should not be surprised when we encounter hardship and suffering. God is Sovereign and God is Love. When we suffer, it is not by accident; it is by God's design. God has ordered our suffering according to His knowledge of our need and for our good. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)."

What is the mystery of suffering? Paul said, "We do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction... that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength... so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God

(2 Corinthians 1:8-9)." The Greek word for affliction is *thlipsis*. It is also translated as tribulation and simply means *pressure*. God has designed suffering to apply pressure on us until we are pressed beyond our natural ability. When we finally come to the end of ourselves, God will reveal the mystery of Christ's crucifixion to us. This is the divine revelation that God included us in His Son's death so that Christ might live in us (Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 1:27). The Son of God died in our place to forgive us from the penalty of sin; He now wants to live in our place to free us from the power of sin. God has made this possible by using Christ's death on the cross to remove our sinful nature and replace it with His Son's holy nature. This divine exchange is the secret to the overcoming Christian life. God has designed suffering to reveal and continually reinforce this divine truth in us. As Paul testified, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me and the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20)."

Many Christians believe they are entitled to happiness rather than destined to suffer. This is a false gospel that will cause many to fall away from the faith during the coming tribulation and persecution. God has not called us to happiness but He has called us to holiness. There is no exception to this call for a Christian. Our reaction to affliction will determine whether our suffering produces God's divine objective - the joy of knowing Jesus Christ and being conformed to His image. Yielding to self-pity, anger and bitterness is a waste of our suffering. If we understand God's purpose in suffering, we can accept our affliction and trust in a wise and loving Almighty God. "Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed in us... for momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond comparison (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17)."

"Therefore, those who suffer according to the will of God should entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." 1 Peter 4:19