

Suffering for Well Doing

“It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.”

—I Peter 3:17

WHEN WE GIVE OUR LIVES

in consecration to our loving Heavenly Father, we solemnly submit ourselves to the doing of his will. This is a continuing commitment and must be carried out in accordance with God’s instructions and the principles of Truth and righteousness. Faithfulness in doing so is an expression of our heart sentiments, and must be kept active. Each day we should renew our dedication to do God’s will, and learn to appreciate whatever new experience he may permit to test our love for him. The psalmist said, “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”—Ps. 37:5

Living a life of consecration and total commitment to God is a serious decision as emphasized by Solomon. “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”—Eccles. 5:4,5

ENDURING HARDNESS

The Apostle Peter used the word ‘suffer’ in our featured scripture and many other instances, when writing his first epistle. The word suffer means to endure or to experience difficulty. It may be used in either a good or bad sense. That is, we suffer for well doing when we are properly exercised by an experience that our Heavenly Father has permitted for our welfare and development as a New Creature in Christ Jesus. Suffering for our own wrongdoing is not in harmony with the will of God, and is therefore not counted as suffering with Christ.

We must exercise care according to the will of God and endure each new experience in a way that would please him. Peter said, “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”—I Pet. 4:15,16

No one of the Lord’s true people can ever think of murdering another person, but all should be aware that hating a brother is an assassination of his character and a theft of his good name. Neither could any of the consecrated people of God consider evil in any sense of the word, but through inherited fleshly weaknesses, or snares of the adversary. Evil thoughts or deeds must be carefully guarded against. Likewise, to stir up false gossip against another brother or sister in the Truth are evil deeds and indicate a heart that is contrary to the spirit of love that marks the truly consecrated child of God. In such cases, the Apostle Paul admonishes, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of

grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”—Heb. 4:16

When an especially severe trial arises, we need to think upon our Heavenly Father’s promised love and guidance as we seek his direction and overruling. We know that he is supervising every experience of our consecrated walk, and it is necessary that we apply his precious promises to ourselves. Peter says, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—II Pet. 1:3,4

If we experience struggles in our mind when suffering for well doing, we should recognize that it is part of fighting the good fight of faith. Learning to wait upon the Lord for his guidance will surely bring us the true peace that comes to all who put their trust in him. The Prophet Isaiah proclaims the wonderful spirit that each of us seeks to attain. He wrote, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.”—Isa. 26:3,4

TESTING NECESSARY

Each one of the Lord’s truly consecrated followers must be tested to prove their loyalty and devotion to him who has called us for a place in his future kingdom. Paul acknowledges that these trials are

often very difficult to accept. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."—Heb. 12:11

Throughout the few short years of our Lord Jesus' earthly ministry, he was severely tested. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:14,15) "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (chap. 5:8,9) The Master could not become perfected until he had proven himself loyal to his Father and suffer for well doing on behalf of the poor sin-sick human family. We are reminded, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord."—Matt. 10:24

During this present Gospel Age, the heavenly call has gone out to those Christian people who have given their lives in consecration to follow our Lord Jesus. They are invited to suffer with him for well doing and, if faithful even unto death, they will be glorified together with him in his future kingdom of righteousness. To be faithful, they learn to accept their experiences with dedication and patient endurance. Our part is to submit our will to our loving Heavenly Father and allow him to direct each experience which he permits to test our faith.

KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS

Our obedience to the will of God is measured by the degree of our love and respect for him, and in keeping his commandments. John brings this to our attention. “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”—John 14:21

By keeping these commandments, our growth in love and faith will be manifest. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:1-4

GOD’S WORKMANSHIP

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul addressed the nature of our new walk in Christ Jesus. “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”—Eph. 2:1-3

Here the apostle explains that we have been quickened, or made alive, by the Holy Spirit of God as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. We are no longer condemned because of our inherited sentence of death and our trespasses and sin, but have been saved by the wonderful grace of God on our behalf. Paul confirms, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit [seated us] together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."—vss. 4-10

GOD IS FAITHFUL

Those who are sincere in their High Calling and new standing before God are now called New Creatures in Christ Jesus. "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation."—II Cor. 5:16-18

Asking for God's help in time of need shows that we are in sympathy with his will for us. It is our desire to please him even though our flesh is weak. If we continue to walk in newness of life and develop the proper attitude of heart, our loving Heavenly Father will never forsake us. We are assured, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."—I Cor. 10:13

Jesus is our example in every step of the way toward our faithfulness, even when we are buffeted in our feeble attempts to suffer with him in well doing. The Apostle Peter wrote, "This is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."—I Pet. 2:19-21

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUFFERING

When Jesus was reviled, he could have taken matters in his own hands and retaliated against those who sought to do him harm. However, he willingly chose to suffer for well doing. Even when it came time for him to be led away to be crucified, he told his captors that he could call for twelve legions of angels to come and save him from such a terrible ordeal. He could have prevented his capture and walked away. He did not do this, but suffered

his enemies to take him because he knew that it was his Father's will for him. He knew he was to give his life for the sins of the human creation, and proclaimed, "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?—Matt. 26:54

Jesus' words, 'Thus it must be' indicate the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies that had been written about his earthly ministry and ransom sacrifice. The lesson for his followers is that they must copy his perfect example and commitment to the Heavenly Father.

The most outstanding example among the Master's faithful followers is the Apostle Paul, who pointed to some of his own experiences in connection with his walk in newness of life. His recollections are inspiring. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."—Phil. 3:7-12

The apostle laid aside his own will and carried out the will of God although it cost him dearly at every

step of the way, ending in an ignominious and most painful death. Thus are we also encouraged to commit our life to our Lord. This course of action is contrary to the fallen human nature, and we must expect conflict to arise between our old nature and the new nature in Christ Jesus. We must oppose the old, and strengthen the new, by a determined effort to follow the example of our Lord Jesus in each experience that comes to us. God will avenge all unrighteousness in his own time and way.

ADMONITIONS

Serious problems had arisen in the church at Corinth, and Paul addressed the matter in his first letter to them. “I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?— I Cor. 6:5-7

The apostle confronted the Corinthian brethren and clearly told them the error of their actions, and that they had disgraced the Truth. He pointed out that there was not one among them who had sound judgment and that could be respected. It was wrong for one brother to go to law against another brother. There was strong indication that the Holy Spirit of God was lacking in the brethren who were involved in the dispute.

Furthermore, he told them, “Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not

that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”—vss. 8-11

In the apostle’s enumeration of the brethren’s sins and faults, he warned that continuing in such unrighteous behavior would exclude them from having any hope of an inheritance in Christ’s future kingdom. ‘Be not deceived’ he said, or to think that they may take advantage of God’s love and mercy unjustly.

MIND OF THE SPIRIT

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul reminded them, “He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”—Rom. 8:27-31

Later, Paul encouraged the brethren to rejoice in the wonderful blessings of Truth, and to be of the same Holy Spirit of God. "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12:14-21) Paul shows that the consciences of some brethren are more fully enlightened with the Holy Spirit of Truth than are others, and their actions more likely to cause them to suffer for well doing.

ENLIGHTENED WITH TRUTH

Paul further explained, "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." (Rom 14:5) Although we generally regard Sunday as a special day for gathering together for study and fellowship, the consecrated Christian has also learned that every day is holy unto the Lord. Each day is consecrated to him, and each one of God's special people is responsible to him who alone can read the heart.

The apostle regarded every day as one in which to be fully devoted and engaged in the service of Truth. He warned, "Now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."—Gal. 4:9-11

Those who are especially called of God during this present Gospel Age will carefully follow his instructions and let the light of Truth shine forth as a witness to others. They do this regardless of the cost or the results. We read, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." (II Cor. 12:15) "Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying."—vs.19

OUR ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

Consecrated Christians who follow Jesus during this present time are to be living sacrifices. They have accepted their privilege in accordance with that given by Paul, who said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

Having presented their bodies to God as a 'living sacrifice' they permit their all to be used up

continually in serving him. As they see opportunities to exercise their talents, they take the initiative and do with their might what their hands find to do. This activity will cost them their all—all of their time and all of their energy—knowing that this is God's will for them. When the old nature of flesh tends to hold back, they ask God for help and he has promised to give them grace to help in every time of need. Thus will they be transformed by the renewing of their mind, gradually bending their affections heavenward and away from the natural earthward tendencies.

If we follow the counsel given in our featured scripture and commit ourselves to our faithful Creator, we will receive the necessary strength to do God's will in every affair of our consecrated life. Let us continue to be faithful, faithfully suffering for well doing, until our humanity is entirely used up as a living sacrifice. ■