

Suffering for Christ

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

—II Timothy 2:12

THE WORDS OF THIS SCRIPTURE

show the direct relationship between faithfulness under trial, and sharing with our Lord Jesus in his future kingdom for blessing the human family. Those who are willing to stand the test of obedience during this present Gospel Age will share as joint-heirs with our glorified Lord. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—Rom. 8:16-18

During Jesus’ earthly ministry he spoke of the spiritual reward that will be given to those who suffer for his name and are faithful to their High Calling. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of

heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”—Matt. 5:10-12

The followers of our Lord must take up their cross when they have committed themselves to him in full consecration even unto death. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:24,25) The one who seeks to preserve his life and its comforts, is the one who will not share joint heirship with our glorified Lord in his future kingdom. It is only through much tribulation that we may share in the heavenly glory and participate in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

THE GOD OF THIS WORLD

The Apostle Paul also pointed to the fact that Satan, the Devil, is the god of this world, and would be allowed to severely test them and all the others who would respond to the heavenly call during this present Gospel Age. “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”—II Cor. 4:4

The faithful followers of Jesus have responded to the wonderful invitation of the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. During their walk in the narrow

way of sacrifice they have been on trial for their loyalty to the Truth of his Word. Those who prove themselves faithful unto death will receive the “crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) This is the grandest of all gifts from our loving Heavenly Father to his faithful children.

TEMPTER OF GOD’S PEOPLE

The principle of our testing, chastening, and patient endurance has been recorded in the Scriptures for our admonition. It was written long before the invitation to the High Calling in Christ Jesus went forth. In the writings of Job, we learn about a certain occasion when Satan presented himself before the Heavenly Father. Even at that early time it was apparent that Satan was a powerful and opposing force that our Heavenly Father permitted to be unleashed against a man of righteousness. Satan was given liberty to plot against Job and to cause him great pain and distress. However, he was not permitted to take his life.

Of this encounter, we read, “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, “From where do you come?” Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.” Then Satan answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on

every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.” Then the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.”—Job 1:6-12, *New American Standard Bible*

Later, Satan returned to present himself to the Heavenly Father and was questioned about Job’s loyalty to righteousness. “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Then Satan answered the LORD and said, “From roaming about on the earth, and walking around on it.” And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause.” And Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face.” So the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”—chap. 2:1-6, *NASB*

JESUS TEMPTED

When our Lord Jesus left his heavenly home to become a perfect man and become the Redeemer of

the human family, he too was permitted to be tempted by Satan. This took place soon after Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan, and had received the Holy Spirit of Truth from his Heavenly Father. (Matt. 3:13-17) The Gospel record provides the details. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred."—Matt. 4:1,2

Satan took the opportunity to tempt Jesus when he was in a weakened state due to his fasting for forty days and nights. "When the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (vss. 3,4) The Devil challenged Jesus to be the Son of God. Having possessed perfect human qualities of mind, memory, and body he answered the tempter by pointing to the wonderful words of scripture that came from the mouth of God.

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." (vss. 5-7) The Temple overlooked the Valley of Hinnom high above the surrounding area. Satan wanted our Lord to recklessly expose himself to

danger and to receive a miraculous deliverance from danger, but he again pointed to the Word of God for his answer.

“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” (vss. 8-11) As the ‘god of this world’ Satan attempted to display his power, and to impress upon Jesus that it would be in his best interest to cooperate with him—the Adversary of the church—instead of giving his life for the sins of the world.

OUR MIGHTY FOE

Satan is the great deceiver and enemy of the human family, but especially to the Lord’s people who are being called during this present Gospel Age. He is a mighty foe and much more powerful and crafty than any one of us. Jesus also commanded him to depart from Peter, “He [Jesus] turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” (Matt. 16:23) Luke recorded, “Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.” (Luke 22:3) The revelator has written that Satan is also called “the Devil,” and is otherwise known as the “great dragon” and that wily “old serpent.” (Rev. 12:9) He especially

targets the Lord's footstep followers, and is "the accuser of our brethren" "before our God day and night."—vs. 10

SPIRITUAL WICKEDNESS

In addition to Satan, the great enemy of the Lord's people and "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), the Apostle Paul points to the agents of darkness—the hosts of powerful demons and wicked spirits—that oppose the narrow way of the consecrated New Creature in Christ Jesus. These unseen agents of the great Adversary exercise unholy influences, and also plot to ensnare and entrap the members of the body of Christ.

Paul thus admonishes us, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."—Eph. 6:11-13

CHASTENING NECESSARY

One of the great principles that govern the calling, selection, and glorification of the faithful class of the Christ is that testing and chastening are the means by which the Lord's people will be shaped and fashioned for a place in Christ's kingdom. The Apostle Paul addressed this matter in his letter to the brethren at Corinth, saying, "Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what

son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” (Heb. 12:6-9, *NASB*) Yet, the consecrated child of God is promised all necessary help from our loving Heavenly Father, even a guardian angel to watch over each of his people. The psalmist wrote, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”—Ps. 34:7

THE BRIDE TESTED

Paul wrote, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” (II Cor. 4:6,7) Because the faithful followers of our Lord are still in the flesh, they must heed the apostle’s admonition. “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; 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.”—vss. 8-10

Those who respond to the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus appreciate their special position and circumstances in the wonderful plan and purpose of God. The Apostle Paul speaks of the opposition that the faithful must endure for their testing as New Creatures in Christ, and relates it to the grand and ultimate purpose of the Heavenly Father. He said, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled,

and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."—Col. 1:23,24

The apostle counted it all joy to suffer tribulations of all manner, knowing that these testings would work out the peaceable fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit of God in his character and life. From another standpoint, he relates his afflictions to that of sharing with our Lord in his suffering and as members of his body.

MANIFOLD TEMPTATIONS

In his first epistle, the Apostle Peter brings our attention to the many temptations that surround us. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (I Pet. 1:6-9) Thus are we assured that the consecrated child of God who is walking in the narrow way of sacrifice will find themselves being severely tested for their faith.

Peter speaks of our temptations further in his epistle and says, "Beloved, think it not strange

concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." (chap. 4:12-14) "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."—vs. 19

ENDURE ALL THINGS

When writing to his beloved Timothy, the apostle provides a glimpse of his trials as a New Creature in Christ. "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."—II Tim. 2:9-13

"Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."—chap. 3:10-12

MADE SPECTACLES

Paul spoke of his experiences as an apostle. “I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.”—I Cor. 4:9,10

The apostle then reiterated some of the ways we are being tested for a position in the future kingdom of the Christ. He said, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.”—vss. 11-16

FILLING UP THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST

The apostle was pointing out that our walk in newness of life is seen by others, even by the angels. When writing to the called-out brethren at Colosse, he also emphasized that the footstep followers of our Lord Jesus during this present Gospel Age are being privileged to share in the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus. He explained to them, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel,

which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." (Col. 1:23,24) Thus are we made spectacles as we walk in newness of life with our dear Lord Jesus.

Paul emphasized that we are to be 'grounded and settled' in Truth and righteousness. We must be rooted in the Truth of God's Word, and our convictions should enable us to be grounded to the point that we will not be swayed by the teachings and traditions of fallen mankind—"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."—Eph. 4:13-15

CAST NOT AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE

When writing to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul reminded them of the great struggle in which we all grow in the discipline of the Lord. He said, "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds,

and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”—Heb. 10:32-36

Throughout the approximately two thousand-year history of the present Gospel Age, the invitation to the heavenly calling has been received by individual followers of our Lord Jesus whose main purpose in their lives has been to make their calling and election sure. It has been a long and difficult journey, but we believe that the time is growing ever closer for the completion of the grand work that began with the wonderful ministry of our beloved Lord Jesus. Let us not become discouraged nor turn back, but go forward as we approach the fruition of all of our hopes and desires in the invitation that has been extended to each of us who are walking in the narrow way.

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