

Transformed
by
distressing trials

Transformed by distressing trials

The flesh belongs to Satan but the Spirit of Christ is God's antidote. So we are to be transformed by taking up our cross. Luke 9:23. This is a call to submit to sharing in the crucified distresses of self sacrifice.

The way of the cross is "*distressed by various trials*" 1 Pet 1:6, but it is the only way to glory. Because the flesh wars against the spirit Gal 5:16, believers will be distressed by trials if they are to follow Christ.

While we might hold to the idea that we do all things as unto the Lord, (Col 3:23) nevertheless, trials are necessary because the flesh wars against the spirit and we often please ourselves.

Our Fleshliness is not only a danger to ourselves and our growth in holiness, but because of the war with the powers of darkness, the flesh also accuses and attacks others as we operate as an unwitting, (clueless) agent of the darkness, even against the brethren, yes, but more so, against God's gospel of salvation. When this dark work happens, the church is no longer a sweet-smelling aroma, in heaven or on earth.

Constant trials prepared for us by God means repentance from self determination will be ongoing (daily) until the Lord returns.

What remains of the flesh in our minds is what satan will use to attack our faith, and the faith of others. As a result, he would have us complaining about our circumstances so we doubt that God has our best interest at heart. Satan would have us react to our difficult circumstances with anger and condemnation in order to attack the kingdom of God. And reacting from the negative feelings that rise up from the heart expose the believer to what is inconsistent with the life of Christ which God has commanded we put to death. Rom 8:13

Satan would also have us embrace self-pity as the first response as we demand attention when we feel we have been the recipient of someone's neglect or accusations. So, self-pity is actually abusing the grace of God who manages our circumstance for our good.

We often fail to see that suffering is the way of Christ into holiness. *'And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wants*

to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, this is the one who will save it.” Luke 9:23-24

Because we are blind to our sin, we need exposure to the suffering of our personal cross which draws out our flesh into the light in order to open our eyes so we can see the problem is in us, not the circumstances that God ordains for our training in righteousness. In this way God opens our eyes to turn away from the self-centred life of the flesh in order for us to live for God. The old life is given up to death that we may live for Christ.

‘He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose on their behalf.’ 2 Cor 5:15

Repentance from sin is ongoing because sanctification from sin is ongoing until Christ returns. *‘So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure.’* Phil 2:12-13

‘For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are in accord with the Spirit, the things of the Spirit... for if you are living in accord with the flesh, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.’ Rom 8:5, 13

Being alive in the Spirit of Christ is to be constantly putting off the ways of the flesh revealed in our reactions to every disagreeable situation God has planned for our good; and then, instead of sinning, we whole heartedly begin putting on the life of Christ, for with Him as our Lord and master we can do what He commands, for what He commands He enables for those who would obey Him.

Those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of God who commands all their circumstances which He ordains so that what satan means for their harm, God means to result for their good. The only way we can grow in holiness is for God to use our difficult circumstances to reveal the sinful ways we still accept in ourselves so we exchange them for the life of Christ.

For His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own

glory and excellence. Through these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of sinful desires.

2 Pet 1:3-4

We are well equipped by God to overcome

Godly change to think with the mind of Christ is made available to us in the word of God. We need to fill our minds with the will of God which is written for our instruction. We need to be able to draw the wisdom of God from our minds at all times, not only in a time of temptation or trial. The spiritual battle with the flesh is endless, and our offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. If we have little of the Spirit's ammunition secured in our minds, we will struggle to defend ourselves from satanic attacks and accusations that we are failures of faith.

Memorising scripture is not a trivial pursuit, it is a life preserver for all who are trained in it. *'All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.'*

2 Tim 3:16-17

A lot more would be accomplished by consciously living in the presence of God instead of forgetting we have been reborn in the image of Christ and that we are a temple of God and the Spirit lives in us. Constantly acknowledging the presence of God throughout the day will assist us in avoiding spiritual amnesia. We must train our minds to continuously walk by the Spirit otherwise we will fall back on the habits of the flesh.

A good example of this is to watch our thinking when we are not fully engaged in some tasks. We will be able to see the idle mind quickly gravitates to reflecting on things of the world and we forget the Spirit. It is then necessary to redirect our thoughts to the things of God in order to train ourselves to live with the mind of Christ. If we do this, we will understand these verses: *'But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.'* Gal 5:16-17
'Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you

sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.'

James 4:7-10

Nothing is good as it was before sin entered the world

No one is naturally able to represent the holiness of God's image since the corruption of the world by sin. But God was not caught off guard. All things are according to His predetermined plan. God is using the corruption of evil in the world to sum up everything in His Son Jesus Christ.

By faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone we are destined for a new and glorious heavenly home. Therefore, our suffering in this world is in the presence of God in Christ, but it is only for a little while compared to our eternal blessed inheritance in glory. What we see in the world is definitely not all we get if our repentance is the result of saving faith from God.

In one sense, the world is a mirror to assist our sanctification in holiness by revealing our sinfulness as we are being perfected in the image of Christ, and no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf. No revealing, no perfecting.

And in another sense, our Father is leading us home through our trials and tribulations He creates in us a burning desire for the blessed Day of the Lord, when all things will be subject to His eternal reign, and death and suffering will be no more. For the devil and all who have his mark of ownership and are reflecting his image of corruption will be cast into eternal damnation.

For a little while we live as aliens in this fallen world, for we have received life in the Spirit as adopted children of God, and our home is now in the kingdom of God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour.

Every disagreeable person or situation to be endured by us has been ordained by God for the good of His children. see Rom 8:28-29

'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our

tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.’ Romans 5:1-5

There is no need to be anxious as Christ rules over all things

‘Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.’

1 Cor 8:6

‘For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation: ¹⁶ for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,’

Col 1:13-19

‘For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.’

Eph 6:12

God is Sovereignty over Sin in the world

“The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets. The Lord has declared disaster concerning you”

2 Chron 18:22

“For it was of God, in order that He might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought the gods of Edom”

2 Chron 25:20
The crucifixion of Jesus was not in the hands of men, it was ordained by God, men just carried out the providence of God for our good. *‘This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*

Acts 2:23

The Bible tells us that in the last days things will be difficult and severe. Paul says, *‘Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud,*

arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.'

2 Tim 3:1-5

As He works out all things God never intended that we know all things. He has revealed enough that we can live by faith in Christ alone. His eternal plans are His business. *"The hidden things belong to God"*

Deut 29:29

If we live by faith and trust in God, everything is as it should be at this time.

'Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.'

Eph 1:4-12

John Piper in a sermon on "All Things Were Created Through Him and for Him" calls on us to look at Col 1:13-19 again and be comforted.

"Memorise this litany of glories and ask God to give you affections that correspond to the measure of this greatness."

Verse 14: In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 15: He is the image of the invisible God.

Verse 15: He is the firstborn of all creation — that is, the specially honoured, first and only Son over all creation.

Verse 16: By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

Verse 16: All things were created through Him.

Verse 16: All things were created for Him.

Verse 17: He is before all things.

Verse 17: In Him all things hold together.

Verse 18: He is the head of the body, the church.

Verse 18: He is the beginning.

Verse 18: He is the firstborn from the dead.

Verse 18: In everything He is preeminent.

Verse 19: In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Verse 20: He reconciles all things to Himself, whether on earth or in heaven.

Verse 20: He makes peace by the blood of His cross.

This is worth memorising. If your heart ever wavers and grows cold, go here; memorise this litany of glories and ask God to give you affections that correspond to the measure of this greatness. If any person or any power or any wisdom or any love awakens any admiration or any amazement or any joy, let it be the greatest Person and the greatest power and the greatest wisdom and the greatest love that exists — Jesus Christ.

So Paul teaches us that Jesus Christ created all that is. They were created through Him. He was with and in God — and was God (John 1:1–3) — as God created all things through Him.

And *all things were created for Him*. All that came into being exists for Christ — that is, it exists to display the greatness of Christ. Nothing — nothing! — in the universe exists for its own sake. Everything from the bottom of the oceans to the top of the mountains, from the smallest particle to the biggest star, from the most boring school subject to the most fascinating science, from the ugliest cockroach to the most beautiful

human, from the greatest saint to the most wicked genocidal dictator — everything that exists, exists to make the greatness of Christ more fully known — including you, and the person you have the hardest time liking.

Again:

So here are the “*rulers and authorities*” that he referred to in Colossians 1:16. They turn up again in Ephesians 6:12: *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities. They are, Paul says, “the cosmic powers over this present darkness . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*

They are evil supernatural powers that aim to deceive and destroy the human race. They have been decisively defeated at the cross where Jesus disarmed them and made his people completely secure through faith in Christ. But they still do much harm in the world because not everyone believes, and even believers can be hurt by them, but not destroyed.

Again:

“All things exist for Christ. They exist to make His glories known.”

It doesn't say He created them evil. In fact, the little book of Jude speaks of “*angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling.*” (Jude 1:6) They were created good, and they rebelled against God. Paul knows this. He knows what they once were and what they have become. And we will see in the weeks to come that Paul knows something else. He knows that Christ knew they would fall before they fell. Christ knew that there would be sin and rebellion and evil. And with infinite wisdom, He took it all into account as He planned the history of salvation and the triumphs of grace at Calvary.

Again:

Paul wants to make crystal clear that when Christians, who feel so small and vulnerable, hear about hostile “*thrones and dominions and rulers and authorities,*” they know beyond any

doubt that Jesus Christ has all authority over them, and they cannot do anything apart from his sovereign permission.

Job 1:12; Luke 22:31

And therefore, finally, Paul tells us these things because he wants us to see and feel that our salvation in Christ is invincible. When Christ died for sin and rose again, *“He disarmed the rulers and authorities”* (Colossians 2:15). Have you put your trust in him? If so, here is what he says about you in Colossians 3:3–4: *“You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

“You are secure forever in Christ.”

Scripture tells us that God is faithful. *‘Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will do it.’* (1 Thess 5:24) *‘Let’s hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful’* (Heb 10:23) *‘and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood’*

Rev 1:5

We are not without help in our time of need. *‘No temptation has overtaken you except something common to mankind; and God is faithful, so He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.’*

1 Cor 10:13

Our heavenly Father is not far away, for His Spirit dwells in us. He’s right here with us in the battle against the forces of darkness. The Lord who died for us loves us and wants us to succeed in our fight against sin. *“God will make this happen, for He who calls you is faithful”*

1 Thess 5:24

God’s rescue plan for us who love Him is to follow the person of Jesus Christ. He understands our weaknesses and temptations: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”*

Heb 4:15–16

Trusting God in tribulation brings contentment

We Christians can be too easily be caught up in our discontent. We often allow disagreeable situations to rob us of our contentment in Christ. Real contentment is a spiritual grace in those who are secure in their relationship with God. When we trust in God and His wisdom for our lives, we will be contented with what He sets before us. *'I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.'* (Phil 4:11) Our contentment is dependent on our relationship with God and not our circumstances. Then *'I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.'* Phil 4:13

Sinclair Ferguson wrote in his book "Deserted by God?"

True contentment is not the same thing as getting whatever we want; it is submitting to the Lord's will and learning to desire what He does. Only then will we discover that His will is good, perfect, and acceptable. (Rom 12:2)

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.' 1 Pet 1:3-9

'Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen.'

Jude 1:24-25

Living Water Resources

Come to the River

‘As a result, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you indeed are suffering.’ 2 Thess 1:4-5

‘Therefore let’s approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need.’

Heb 4:16

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