

Christ's Sufferings Our Sufferings

by F.J. Huegel

We are called to rejoice in participation in Christ's sufferings, which is a blessing and a sign of our union with Him, and to manifest His life in our mortal flesh.

Scripture: John 15:2, Romans 6:5, 2 Corinthians 1:5, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24, Hebrews 10:12, James 1:2, 1 Peter 4:13

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Participation in Suffering"

Description

F.J. Huegel emphasizes the profound connection between Christ's sufferings and our own, illustrating that believers are called to participate in both His tribulations and victories. He explains that while Christ's sacrificial suffering on the Cross is complete and cannot be added to, Christians are invited to share in the ongoing sufferings of Christ as they live out their faith. This participation not only deepens our identification with Christ but also transforms our suffering into a source of spiritual growth and compassion for others. Huegel encourages believers to rejoice in their sufferings, as they are a means through which Christ's life is manifested in us, ultimately leading to greater fruitfulness in our lives. He concludes with a message of hope, reminding us that our afflictions serve a divine purpose and contribute to the edification of the Church.

Transcript

It is striking how over and over this word Participation appears in the New Testament. We are told that we are made partners of Christ. In Romans vi, we are given to understand that His Cross is our Cross; His tomb, our tomb. In Ephesians ii, we are made to see that in Him we were raised from the dead, and actually made to sit with Him in the Heavenlies. Not only that, we are assured again and again that Christ's victory, is our victory, that we may always overcome the Wicked One, because of Calvary, and our participation in the fruits of the Cross (2 Cor. ii. 14).

And now again we are startled by the marvellous fact, that we are made to be partakers of Christ's sufferings. Peter bids us rejoice over this fact. He would have us be glad because we have been called to share the tribulations of the glorified Saviour. "Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Pet. iv. 13).

Paul, the great Apostle of the doctrine of the indwelling Christ, as has already been stated, was wont to interpret his trials and tribulations as a Christian, and an Apostle, in the light of the Cross, and see in them a prolongation of Christ's own sufferings. To the Colossians, he wrote: "I 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. i. 24). It was Christ suffering in and through him. The Saviour's passion is not yet over. Drops of blood still fall from His brow. It could not be otherwise, this world being what it is, and Christ being what He is.

We are not, of course, to think of this suffering as having aught to do with Christ's great vicarious suffering as the sacrificial Lamb, there upon the Cross, the burden He bore as our Sin-Bearer, when "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "This man after that He offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. x. 12'). "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. x. 10). "By the one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14). Of this Cosmic achievement the Saviour Himself cried out with a great voice that rent the rocks, "It is finished." Nothing can be added to the work consummated on the Cross. We must take care not to permit anything of the nature of a confused thought to enter here. The entire body of revealed Truth, both in the Old and the New Testament, converges in one overwhelmingly sublime fact: Christ died for our sins. All the chorus of inspired voices are pitched to their major key. To be uncertain in our exegesis here would not only be fatal but infinitely damnable. With good reason Paul cries out: "If any one preach any other gospel . . . let him be accursed." The ground of all human hope-hope which reaches out to embrace the eternal ages to come must not be trifled with.

We must not confuse these sufferings of Christ, of which we are the partakers, with the completed work of Calvary. I repeat, nothing can ever be added to that absolute consummation. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy Cross I cling." In that all-sufficient sacrifice for sin the believer had no part. He can only accept the forgiveness which issues from the Cross.

Nor are we to confuse these sufferings of Christ and His Body with the objective fact of our identification with Christ in His death, as set forth in Romans vi. That also is a completed thing. We are commanded to simply reckon on it as a consummated, historic fact, just as we count on the fact of Christ's death for us. For that "death-identification" we reckon back to Calvary. When we believe what God has to say about our oneness with His Son in His death to sin, and the "old life," and on the ground of God's Word simply refuse the "old life" as if it were an utterly powerless thing-which it really is, because of our communion with Christ in His death-we are released from the bondage of Self. The old life drops off like a decayed garment. We are now alive unto God. And now in the power of this new divine life, as members of Christ's body, there comes to us as an inevitable consequence a participation in Christ's sufferings. Because our life now issues from the Throne, because, in spirit, we are virtually seated in the Heavens, and because, as never before, we are one with Christ-in lieu of all this we discover working within us a new spirit of love. The love of Christ constraining us, inevitably issues in a great suffering. We groan with unutterable groanings of the spirit. Could the Christ, the agony of whose prayer upon one occasion turned the sweat of His brow into blood, dwell in us by His Spirit, and pray through us, without that at times our prayer (for it is still our prayer though He inspires it) should become a groaning unutterable? Could the Christ who dwells within us, through us seek perishing souls, without that we should upon occasions be in an agony of sorrow over those who reject the Saviour's love? Could the Christ, who because of this world's injustice and greed and hate, died of a broken heart, dwell within us without that we should feel the pain of the world's sorrow and shame? Let no one imagine that because of our oneness with Christ in the Heavens, we are therefore brought to some fool's paradise which exempts us from further suffering. The truth of the matter is, that it simply increases our capacity for suffering ten thousandfold. It simply increases our power for the bearing of pain in an infinite manner. We begin "to bear about in our body the dying of the Lord

Jesus" (2 Cor. iv. 10). If Goethe, because of poetic sensibilities so refined and keen, found that he had withdrawn from the world, for it seemed to him that he would die from sheer pain, so great was the burden which contact with the world's sin and sorrow brought to a tender spirit,-what about one whose spirit is not simply refined, by "the muses," but brought into living communion with the Christ of Calvary?

When "praying Hyde of India" finally succumbed and took his flight to the celestial abode, doctors performed a post-mortem and found that the heart had been completely changed from its natural position. Hyde's prayer-life had been so intense--he spent whole nights groaning before the Lord, burdened for dying souls-that he literally died of a broken heart.

Witness the suffering of the early Christians, the travail of the Martyrs, the birth pangs of missionaries who are called upon to bring forth from the bowels of their compassion whole races sunken in debauchery. There can be no re-birth of souls without travail on the part of Christians. Witness the trials and afflictions of a St. Francis. Juen-de-Beuf, a missionary to the North American Indians, was literally burned to death (slowly by red-hot coals, so as to increase his agony). So marvellous a spirit of tranquillity and compassion did he manifest that in the final hour of death the Indians tore open the missionary's breast and drank his blood, and ate his heart. "We would be like him," they said, "he is a god." The Galilean had won after all. It was His Face they had seen as they watched the suffering saint, and He broke their hearts. It was Calvary being re-enacted. We are to rejoice inasmuch as we are made partakers of Christ's sufferings.

I have been re-reading the story of St. Francis' bloody stigmata-the sacred stigmata of the lowly and beloved Francis. Somehow it has never been hard for me to believe in Francis' wounds, which according to Catholic historians were printed upon this devout companion of lepers by a flaming seraph. Francis, they say, was wont to bleed from his hands and his feet. An exact replica of Christ's wounds appeared in the body of the great Assisan. Somehow, I have never doubted these mysterious wounds of Francis, and I am not Roman Catholic. Paul said that he bore in his body "the marks of the Lord Jesus." Frances Underhill, the greatest living authority on mysticism, seems to think that Paul had experienced the holy stigmata-that the Saviour's wounds appeared in him. We do not know. Be that all as it may, wounds or no wounds, Paul was conformed to Christ's death; holy stigmata or no, Francis bore the image of the Crucified. "The flesh profiteth nothing." The great fact is that we are all to bear the Saviour's image; we are to be conformed to His death. In the power of His resurrection we are to have the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death (Phil. iii. 10).

And, praise God, this suffering is not without its precious fruit. Christ turns it all to our account. He uses it all to prune the branches of the Vine that they may bear more fruit (John xv. 2). Nothing touches us without first passing through His hands and being made to serve our highest eternal interests. "We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus." Why? "That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. iv. 10). How are these "rivers of living water" to flow from our innermost being except the "outer-self" be broken? The grape does not yield its precious juice without the breaking of the outer wall. The walls of "self-hood" must be levelled, if we are to yield life for Jesus. That is why the Holy Spirit turns us over to death-"For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh So then death worketh in us but life in you" (2 Cor. iv. 11).

What a blessed message for the afflicted soul. Oh! child of God, lift up your head for your redemption draweth nigh. It is not in vain that you suffer. There can be no gold without the refiner's fire. Christ is glorified in your patience. You are bidden to count it all joy when you suffer divers testings (James i. 2) .

From your wounds healing streams of life-Christ's own life-are flowing. This will make for the increase and edification of Christ's body. What you suffer will deepen your "death-identification-position" with Christ. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, else it abideth alone.

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.

"And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.

"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isa. liv. 11-13).

"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." (2 Cor. i. 5) .

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