

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

WHEN GOD’S SAINTS ARE AFFLICTED

By Dan Richardson

Life has its varied afflictions – disappointment, guilt, suffering, grief, deprivation, hostility, persecution, death – all are the universal plight of mankind. Righteous Job stated that *“man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble”* (Job 14:1). Moses said, *“We finish our years like a sigh ...for it is soon cut off, and we fly away”* (Psa. 90:9-10). Likewise, David by inspiration writes of his afflictions and their positive effects in his life (Psa. 119:65-72); it is from this text we will consider three lessons to remember when God’s saints are afflicted.

GOD HAS DEALT ACCORDING TO HIS WORD (vs. 65). Nowhere does God teach us that we can escape life’s varied afflictions just because we are His children. Concerning the afflictions of God’s people, Peter said, *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy”* (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Too many view life’s afflictions with a “why me?” disposition, questioning, accusing, and renouncing God because of life’s tragedies. But God says, *“If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small”* (Prov. 24:10). Addressing Christians who were suffering severe persecution for their faith, Jesus said, *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rev. 2:10). Rather than Christians giving a cowardly retreat when confronted with tribulations, Jesus said be faithful even if it costs your life! Life’s trials must not become excuses for our negligence in service to God.

WE YEARN FOR GOD (vss. 66, 69, 72). *First*, God’s people, in the face of affliction, must seek for wisdom to live pleasing to God. David’s petition was, *“Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments”* (vs. 66). Also, James instructed afflicted saints to ask God for wisdom so truth may be applied in life’s struggles (Jas. 1:2-5).

Second, Christians must genuinely commit to God. David said, *“I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart”* (vs. 69). Those who are half-hearted, double-minded and with a divided allegiance are the antithesis to the total commitment that the Lord demands of his people. *“Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass”* (Psa. 37:5). The apostle Peter, teaching the value of Christian suffering, concluded by saying, *“Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator”* (1 Pet. 4:19).

Third, saints must have their priorities in right order. David showed what was most important in his life when he said, *“The law of Your mouth is better for me than thousands of shekels of gold and silver”* (vs. 72). Yearning for God, we will seek the discernment to *“approve the things that are excellent”* (Phil. 1:10). Those who are spiritually mature have exercised themselves *“to discern both good and evil”* (Heb. 5:14).

WE PROFIT BY AFFLICTIONS (vss. 67, 71). Rather than have a *“woe is me”* attitude when afflicted, David knew the spiritual value that could be derived from such in his life. *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word...It was good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes”* (vss. 67, 71). How easy it is to forget God when all is going well. Moses sought to impress this upon the heart of Israel before they entered Canaan: *“Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest – when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage ...then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’”* (Deut. 8:11-14, 17).

Consider three benefits of afflictions according to scripture: *First*, to be humbled. Moses reminded Israel how God afflicted them to wander forty years in the wilderness, **“to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not”** (Deut. 8:2). The way in which man becomes guilty of lifting up his heart to forget God in times of prosperity (like now) is stated by Moses: **“then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’”** (Deut. 8:17). The prodigal son **“came to himself”** because he had hit rock bottom in his life (Lk. 15:14-17). Likewise, even the apostle Paul was afflicted – a **“thorn in the flesh...a messenger of Satan”** – in order to learn humility (2 Cor. 12:7-10). All who would please God must learn humility.

Second, to become teachable and obedient. When one becomes humble, he then becomes teachable. David said, **“It was good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.”** Moses stated that Israel’s humility was designed, **“So you should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him”** (Deut. 8:5-6). Even our Lord Jesus **“learned obedience by the things which He suffered”** (Heb. 5:8).

Third, to work patience. **“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”** (Jas. 1:2-4). Patience is spiritual endurance to overcome the obstacles (afflictions) in life and remain faithful to the end – like the athlete needs to win the race (Heb. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 9:24), like the farmer needs to harvest his crops (Jas. 5:7-8), and like the Christian needs to receive God’s eternal reward promised (Heb. 10:36-39). ■

How Does the Spirit “Bear Witness”?

By Greg Gwin

Romans 8:16 says, **“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”** The big question is, of course, how does He do this?

There are many that would suggest that the Spirit **“bears witness”** by means of some better-felt-than-told experience. Usually we are given an account of some episode that left the person with an overwhelming emotional feeling. Because of this experience the person claims salvation and is certain that it was the work of the Spirit that caused it all to happen.

There are some problems with this approach. First, as we study cases of conversion in the New Testament, we find not a single case of an individual who was saved through such an experience. In cases where individuals actually had supernatural “experiences,” they still had to hear the Word and obey its commands (Saul - Acts 9; Cornelius - Acts 10; the Jailer - Acts 16, etc.).

Also, we are puzzled by the fact that various individuals who claim to have experienced this confirmation of the Spirit have differing views on fundamental doctrinal issues. We wonder how that could be if they are truly receiving some action directly from the Holy Spirit. Do you see the problem?

So, how does the Spirit **“bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God”**? How can we have this confidence and confirmation of the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit through inspiration produced the written word of God. When we compare our lives with that perfect revelation, we are able to see if we have done those things that are commanded in order to be a child of God. Have you believed (Heb. 11:6), repented of sins (Lk. 13:3), confessed faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10), and been baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)? Do you continue to faithfully serve the Lord (Rev. 2:10)? If so, the Spirit **“bears witness”** through the Scriptures that you are a child of God. – *Collegue church of Christ Articles*, September 9, 2018. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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