

## The Problem of a Suffering Christian

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A child of God oppressed, suffering sorely, often driven to his wit's end..what a strange thing! A joint-heir with Christ financially embarrassed, poor in this world's goods, wondering where his next meal is coming from..what an anomaly! An object of the Father's everlasting love, and distinguishing favor tossed up and down upon a sea of trouble, with every *apparent* prospect of his frail barque capsizing..what a perplexity!

One who has been regenerated and is now indwelt by the Holy Spirit daily harassed by Satan, and frequently overcome by indwelling sin..what an enigma! Loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, his body made the temple of the Holy Spirit, yet left in this world year after year to suffer affliction and persecution, to mourn and groan over innumerable failures, to encounter one trial after another, often to be placed in far less favorable circumstances than the wicked; to sigh and cry for relief, yet for sorrow and suffering to *increase*..what a mystery! What Christian has not felt the force of it, and been baffled by its inscrutability.

Now it was to cast light upon this pressing problem of the sorely tried believer that Romans 8 was written. There the apostle was moved to show that "*the sufferings of this present time*" (v. 18) are *not inconsistent* with the special favor and infinite love which God bears unto His people.

**First**, because by those sufferings the Christian is brought into personal and experimental fellowship with the sufferings of Christ (Rom 8:17; cf. Phil 3:10).

**Second**, severe and protracted as our afflictions may be, yet there is an immeasurable disproportion between our present sufferings and the future Glory (Rom 8:18-23).

**Third**, our very sufferings provide occasion for the exercise of hope and the development of patience (Rom 8:24,25).

**Fourth**, Divine aids and supports are furnished us under our afflictions (Rom 8:26,27) and it is *these* we would now consider.

"*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities*" (Rom 8:26). Not only does "hope" (a sure expectation of God's making good His promises) support and cheer the suffering saint, leading him to patiently wait for deliverance from his afflictions, but the blessed Comforter has also been given to him in order to supply help to this very end. By His *gracious aid* the believer is preserved from being totally submerged by his doubts and fears. By His *renewing operations* the spark of faith is maintained, despite all the fierce winds of Satan which assail. By His *mighty enabling* the sorely harassed and groaning Christian is kept from sinking into complete skepticism, abject despair, and infidelity. By His *quickenning power* hope is still kept alive, and the voice of prayer is still faintly heard.

And how is the gracious help of the Spirit *manifested*? Thus: seeing the Christian bowed down by oppression and depression, His compassion is called forth, and He strengthens with His might in the inner man. Every Christian is a living witness to the truth of this, though he may not be conscious of the Divine process. Why is it, my afflicted brother, my distressed sister, that you have not made shipwreck of your profession long ere this? What has kept you from heeding that repeated temptation of Satan's to totally abandon the good fight of faith? Why has not your manifold "infirmities" annihilated your faith, extinguished your hope, and cast a pall of unrelieved gloom upon the future?

The answer is, because the blessed Spirit silently, invisibly, yet sympathetically and effectually *helped* you. Some

precious promise was sealed to your heart, some comforting view of Christ was presented to your soul, some whisper of love was breathed into your ear, and the pressure upon your spirit was reduced, your grief was assuaged, and fresh courage possessed you.

Here, then, is real light cast upon the problem of a suffering Christian, the most perplexing feature of that problem being how to harmonize sore sufferings with the love of God. But if God had ceased to care for His child, then He had deserted him, left him to himself. Very far from this, though, is the actual case: the Divine Comforter is given to help his infirmities.

Here, too, is the sufficient answer to an objection which the carnal mind is ready to make against the inspired reasoning of the apostle in the context: How can we who are so weak in ourselves, so inferior in power to the enemies confronting us, bear up under our trials which are so numerous, so protracted, so crushing? We could not, and therefore Divine grace has provided for us an all-sufficient Helper. Without His aid we had long since succumbed, mastered by our trials. Hope looks forward to the Glory to come; in the weary interval of waiting, the Spirit supports our poor hearts and keeps grace alive within us.