
The Tranquilizing Ministry

of the Word of God, Prayer and the Holy Spirit

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— Keith R. Blades

Stress! It has been the medical buzzword for the past decade or so, and not without a few good reasons. Since we possess bodies that respond directly to our souls, it is easy to realize that there is often a direct connection between the condition of our bodies and the state of our soul. Our emotions are the expressions of our soul through the members of our bodies. If our soul is troubled or upset, our countenance is not the only thing that undergoes a change. Other members of our bodies are also affected, and a pain in the soul can soon become a pain in the body. Stress upon the soul can take its toll upon the body in a wide variety of ways. This, once again, is something the medical community has taken particular notice of and has begun to address. In connection with this all sorts of stress-reducing remedies are being promoted, ranging from forms of relaxation therapies to stress-busting vitamins to mind-altering drugs. Coping with stress has not only become a medical concern, it has also become a multi-billion dollar business. Tranquilizers of all different sorts are being sought after and developed as people endeavor to find a way of providing rest for their souls when they are troubled, perplexed, and distressed.

As Christians we are not immune to the disease of a troubled soul. Though our souls should not be troubled in the least by many of the things that distress the unsaved; (e.g. what will happen to us when we die, the fate of the world, etc.), there are still plenty of things that we can experience in this world that can trouble us. For example, in Romans 8:18ff the Apostle Paul addresses the issue of the "sufferings of this present time" that

we can, and do, experience simply because we still live in a sin-cursed world.

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.

(Romans 8:18)

These common "sufferings" can produce in us the same kinds of misery, distress, and turmoil of soul that they produce in others. Hence, Paul's need to address them. In addition to the "sufferings of this present time" Paul also talks to us about being partakers of "the sufferings of Christ."

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

(II Corinthians 1:5)

The "sufferings of Christ" are not common to man. Instead, they are the particular aspects of Satan's policy of evil against us because of who we are "in Christ." Nevertheless, they are "sufferings" and as such they are designed by our Adversary to produce stress and to put our souls in a state of distress.

In view of "the sufferings of this present time" and "the sufferings of Christ" we often find Paul talking to us about the issue of the effect that they had upon him, and would have upon us. For example,...

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;

(II Corinthians 4:8-9)

Notice that Paul says he was "troubled on every side"; he was "perplexed"; he was "persecuted"; and he was even "cast down." In other places he cites times at which he "despaired even of life"; "without were fightings, within were fears"; was "in distresses"; was "weak" beyond compare. And on top of all this, at all times he experienced "that which cometh on me daily, the care of all the churches." Paul knew what stress was. He experienced the full effects of both "the sufferings of this present time" and "the sufferings of Christ." All the modern day psychological terminology descriptive of a troubled soul was something he was very familiar with. Yet, though this was the case, Paul was not overcome by stress. It did not swallow him up and turn him into a basket case. For as familiar as Paul was with stress and stress-producing situations, He was even more familiar with something else — the tranquilizing ministries of the Word of God, Prayer, and the Holy Spirit.

It goes beyond the ability of this article to deal with these three issues at length. Yet let us briefly consider a few passages from which we should gain some appreciation for these wonderful tranquilizing ministries.

The Word of God

Notice, once again, Paul's testimony in II Corinthians 4:8-9:

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;

(II Corinthians 4:8-9)

The natural tendency of the experiences Paul cites here would be to produce crippling stress. Being "troubled on every side" would tend to make one "distressed" thinking that you could not cope. Being "perplexed" tends to put one in a state of "despair" thinking that there is no way out of your situation. Being "persecuted" tends to make one think that he is "forsaken" and no longer cared for. And being "cast down" tends to make one think that he is completely defeated or "destroyed." Though this is the natural tendency of these experiences, it was not the case with Paul. He was "not distressed"; "not in despair"; "not forsaken"; and "not destroyed." Instead of experiencing crippling stress, Paul experienced tranquility of soul and spirit.

Paul's tranquility was the result of his "spirit of faith." He believed some very specific things that God has given to us to understand, appreciate, and believe. His mind was occupied with what God has said, instead of with the circumstances he found himself in. And being persuaded of the truth of what God said, regardless of what the circumstances indicated, God's word effectually worked within him to produce tranquility in his soul and spirit. As Paul said,...

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is
written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we
also believe, and therefore speak;...

(II Corinthians 4:13)

Paul had a "spirit of faith" just like David wrote about. In Psalm 116 David described the issue of his great distress when "the sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me." As he says, "I found trouble and sorrow." He called upon the Lord to deliver his soul from its trouble, fear, and anxiety. The Lord's response was to tell David something that he needed to believe. David believed it and was able to say,...

Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee...

I believed, therefore have I spoken:...

(Psalm 116:7, 10a)

In like manner, Paul's "spirit of faith" in what God has said to us today enabled him to have his soul at rest. Instead of crippling stress, he was comforted, encouraged, and enlivened through the effectual working of God's word within him. And God's word, because it is God's word, is able to effectually mediate between a troubled soul and an anxious spirit, and so produce rest. As Hebrews 4:12 declares,...

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

(Hebrews 4:12)

Because God's word is able to pierce "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit" it can effectually produce rest for the inner man. It can successfully buffer the spirit from the soul's reaction to adversity. And having done so it enables the spirit to be occupied with such things as the truth of what is going on; with the Divine viewpoint; with what God values and esteems; and the like.

Hence, such a "spirit of faith" is able to objectively look at the situation, see it as God does, and confidently say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul."

Prayer

Simply put, prayer is the issue of communing with God and enjoying focused intimacy of fellowship with Him as we express to Him the matters of our heart. As such, in prayer we can talk to the Lord about our cares and concerns. We can go over with Him the details of our lives and their conformity to His will. We can discuss with

Him matters of discernment regarding the application of His word. We can do all this, and more, through prayer. Because of this, prayer has a tranquilizing ministry to it. Through the focused fellowship of prayer we are held accountable in a very special way to God's viewpoint concerning the details of our lives. This enables us to honestly look at our situation. Through the intimacy of prayer we are led to evaluate things on the basis of what really counts, (i.e. what God values and esteems), and to appreciate the reality of God actively working in us "both to will and to do of His good pleasure." In view of this prayer refreshes us. For through it we enjoy intimacy of fellowship with our God, Who is not troubled, or anxious, or distressed, or depressed by what we are going through. Hence, neither should we be. Therefore, Paul exhorts us saying,...

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:6-7)

The Holy Spirit

Though the Holy Spirit works in conjunction with both the tranquilizing ministries of the word of God and prayer, Paul also teaches us about a special tranquilizing ministry He has for us in those times when "we know not what we should pray for as we ought."

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God.

(Romans 8:26-27)

Being perplexed is often very upsetting. As noted earlier it tends to lead to despair as you find yourself at your wit's end, not knowing what to do. When we "know not what we should pray for as we ought" we are certainly perplexed. We are weak and confused and cannot even utter, or express, the matters of our heart. Distress and despair could easily follow. But God has not left us without a means of rest for our souls even in times such as these. Instead, we are taught about a special ministry of the Holy Spirit in which He undertakes for us and does what we cannot do. He "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." He expresses for us what we cannot utter, because we know not what to pray for. In view of this we can relax, knowing that the Holy Spirit has discerned God's will for us in our situation and has interceded for us, just as if we had known what to pray for and had done so ourselves.

In this dispensation of grace God has provided us with completely sufficient tranquilizers capable of handling any of "the sufferings of this present time" or any of "the sufferings of Christ." It is little wonder therefore that the Apostle Paul would often refer to God as "the God of peace." May we be ones who likewise with Paul appreciate God as such, and who can say with him,... — *Keith R. Blades*

Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation,...

(II Corinthians 1:3-4a)