
The Gift of God

Few Christians Seem to Want

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God is a giver of gifts. In both God's program with Israel and in His program with us today in this dispensation of His grace, gifts from God are commonly spoken about. For example, in connection with Israel's program we find the following...

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the GIFT of the Holy Ghost.

(Acts 2:38)

17 Every good GIFT and every perfect GIFT is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

(James 1:17)

3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*;

4 God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and GIFTS of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

(Hebrews 2:3-4)

"...and have tasted of the heavenly GIFT,..."

(Hebrews 6:4)

Then to us in this dispensation of grace we can find the apostle Paul saying,...

7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper GIFT of God, one after this manner, and another after that.

(I Corinthians 7:7)

15 Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable GIFT.

(II Corinthians 9:15)

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the GIFT of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

(Ephesians 3:7)

7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the GIFT of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:7)

In both of God's programs the pre-eminent gift is the gift of eternal life. But it is not the only gift, as the preceding verses show. And if we add to these the issue of the various spiritual gifts that operated at the beginning of this dispensation of grace, it is all the more obvious that God truly is a giver of gifts. In view of this the doctrine of gifts is of great interest. However, amidst all the talk and fervor that there is over the issue of the gifts of God, there is one gift that is often overlooked, or seldom mentioned. In fact, when it is pointed out for the gift of God that it is, it is usually not very well received. Indeed, few Christians seem to even want it. Yet it is a gift that the Apostle Paul recognized was a special privilege of God's grace to have given to him, and therefore he cherished it and teaches us that we should do the same.

This special gift of God is the gift of *suffering for His sake*.

The Gift

In Philippians 1:29-30, Paul taught the saints at Philippi that they needed to realize that it truly was a gift and privilege of God's grace unto them to suffer for the cause of Christ as they were doing.

29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, BUT ALSO TO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE;

30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

(Philippians 1:29-30)

That suffering should ever be thought of as a gift and a privilege is something hard to accept. It grates against our customary thinking as well as our wants. Hence, the Philippian saints were having some difficulty with it, especially now that their suffering included "having the same conflict" Paul was experiencing. Nevertheless, their suffering for Christ's sake was indeed a gift and privilege of God's grace unto them, and they needed to realize that so they could respond to it properly. Instead of murmuring and complaining, they needed to rejoice. Instead of not wanting to so suffer, they needed to have Paul's attitude to such sufferings. And so should we.

20 According to my earnest expectation and *my* hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether *it be* by life, or by death.

(Philippians 1:20)

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

(Philippians 3:10)

24 Who now 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:

(Colossians 1:24)

Paul understood that it was a gift of God and a privilege of His grace to suffer for Christ's sake. Hence, he didn't simply endure it or tolerate it. He wanted it. He cherished it. He even rejoiced over it. For he knew that suffering for Christ's sake was not only a gift of God, it was a very special gift; an honored gift of God through which an opportunity to glorify Christ was granted to him.

Two Kinds of Suffering

Before we consider this any further it is important for us to recognize that not all suffering is suffering for Christ's sake. Far from it. Instead, Paul teaches us that there are primarily two kinds of suffering that we can experience in this world, and the most common of all is the suffering we have in common with all men.

In Romans 8 Paul describes the source of our most common suffering as "the sufferings of this present time."

18 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)

The "sufferings of this present time" are just that, the sufferings that we will experience during this "present time" because of the "bondage of corruption" that still grips creation. In common with all creation we suffer the effects of corruption as we eagerly await "the redemption of our body." Hence, Paul says,...

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

(Romans 8:22-23)

As corruption takes its toll, the whole creation, including ourselves, "groaneth and travaileth in pain." Sickness, disease, decay, and death; along with other effects of corruption like accidents, bloodshed, pestilence, being victims of crime and evil, and the like are our common lot. Hence, pain and suffering because of "the bondage of corruption" will be experienced by us for as long as this dispensation of grace continues on. This, once again, we have in common with all creation, and therefore the "sufferings of this present time" are not to be thought of by us as suffering for Christ's sake. However, suffering for Christ's sake is not something that is common to man. Rather, it is a kind of suffering that can only come upon us who belong to Christ, as we become the objects of both the world's hatred of Christ and Satan's despising of us. Paul introduces us to the reality of this special kind of suffering further on in Romans 8.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

(Romans 8:35-36)

As Paul shows by citing the similar situation described in Psalm 44:22, the sufferings that he talks about here are "*for thy sake*." Therefore, they are not sufferings that are simply common to man. Instead, they are sufferings *for Christ's sake*. They are what Paul describes in greater detail in II Corinthians as "the sufferings of Christ."

5 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 sufferings that come upon us as those who hate Christ make us the object of their hatred. In particular, they are sufferings from the Satanic policy of evil against us, as Satan vents his anger and takes out on the body of Christ that which he cannot take out on Christ Himself. Hence, this kind of suffering is very special in nature and we need to recognize it as distinct from the "sufferings of this present time." Yet much more than this, suffering for Christ's sake needs to be recognized by us as a privilege of God's grace; a gift given to us of God; a grace by which we are granted the marvellous opportunity to actually glorify God and magnify Christ, which is the exact opposite of the Adversary's intention in causing us to suffer.

To The Glory of God

Briefly put, there are three particular ways that God is glorified when we suffer for Christ's sake.

First, as Paul teaches in Romans 8, instead of having us think that we have been separated from the love of Christ by such sufferings, God has provided it so that...

37 Nay, in all these things we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS through him that loved us.

(Romans 8:37)

To be "more than conquerors" means much more than just not being defeated by the sufferings. It means more than not being made to think that because we suffer we have been separated from the love of Christ. It means that they actually work to our advantage. Instead of making us think that we have been separated from the love of Christ, they actually become the means by which we are able to appreciate God as "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."

Paul teaches us this in II Corinthians 1 where he says,...

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

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

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

(II Corinthians 1:3-5)

There is no way that we can come to appreciate God as "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" if we do not need mercy and comfort. Hence, it is especially by means of "the sufferings of Christ" that God has designed for us to understand and appreciate Him as such. And when we appreciate Him as such, we glorify Him as we "bless" him for His mercy and comfort, just as Paul did. Because of this, in all these things we truly are "more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Second, God is glorified when we also appreciate *the excellency of the power of His word working within us*, stabilizing us, comforting us, and so enabling us to endure the sufferings. Hence in II Corinthians 4:7ff, after describing his own understanding and appreciation for this in view of "the sufferings of Christ" he endured, Paul says,...

15 For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

(II Corinthians 4:15)

Through the example of Paul's own "spirit of faith" we are taught about the "excellency of the power" of God's word to likewise work within us. As he was "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifest in our body," we are shown

how that same "life of Jesus" is designed to be manifest in us. And when we realize this as Paul did, and give God thanks for the same "excellency of His power" working in us, it redounds to His glory.

Thirdly, God is glorified as this same "excellency of the power" of God's word working within us is put on display to the chagrin of Satan and his principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Paul teaches us this in II Corinthians 11 and 12, especially as he recounts the time at which he learned it.

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

(II Corinthians 12:7-9)

When the Lord told Paul, "my strength is made perfect in weakness," Paul was not the only one whom God expected to recognize that truth. The "messenger of Satan" was going to realize it too, and in turn Satan himself would be confronted with it. In this dispensation of grace the "excellency of the power" of God's word is not only being made manifest to us and for our appreciation, it is also being put on display to Satan and his cohorts. God is confronting them with the issue of the superiority of the power of His word working within His saints to successfully equip them to withstand and overcome any of their opposition. And in this God is glorified.

With God having designed it so that we can actually glorify Him when we suffer for Christ's

sake, it is little wonder that Paul was not ashamed to do so. It is little wonder that he gloried in his infirmities and said...

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

(II Corinthians 12:10)

Suffering for Christ's sake was a gift of God that Paul gladly received. He understood the significance and privilege wrapped up in those three words, "*for Christ's sake.*" Therefore he wanted the gift. He cherished the gift. And he rejoiced over the gift. May we, as ones to whom the same gift is given, learn to do likewise and not refuse the gift as is so often done. — *Keith R. Blades*