

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Suffering with Christ.

BY THE VENERABLE JOHN W. DIGGLE, M.A., ARCHDEACON OF WESTMORLAND, AND
CANON OF CARLISLE CATHEDRAL.

SUFFERING in itself, and apart from its restraining, purifying, sweetening effects, is an evil and not a good. There does not appear to have been any suffering in the world before there was sin. Suffering was ordained partly as a penalty, and partly as a purification for sin. As a penalty, it is the punitive indignation of righteousness against iniquity; vindicating the majesty of goodness and restraining the tempted from the commission of wrong. As a purification, its purpose is to cleanse and deepen and beautify man's inward life.

But the effect of suffering entirely depends on the temper with which it is borne. The same fire which melts wax bakes clay. The oft-convicted felon is rarely made better by his frequent imprisonments. The plagues of Egypt hardened Pharaoh's heart. The afflictions of Job inclined his wife to curse God. The helot is not ennobled by being downtrodden. Great sufferings, while they lead some to a deeper trust in God's Providence, lead others to the infidelity of despair. The pains and miseries which commonly follow licentious indulgence by no means always foster a spirit of penitent contrition. The witness of history testifies conclusively that the terrors of an earthquake incite men sometimes indeed to prayer, but sometimes also to blasphemy. Torments do not convert the heart of a demon into that of an angel. The effects of suffering correspond with the spirit of the sufferer.

Even when those effects are beneficent, the sufferer's spirit is not necessarily, and in an especial sense, Christian. Outside the pale of Christianity there have been many brave and noble sufferers, whose sufferings have developed in them rich and beautiful fruits of sympathy, purity, loftiness and refinement of mind, gentleness and tenderness of heart. And yet these sufferers have not been, at all events consciously, partakers of the sufferings of Christ.

What, then, is meant by suffering with Christ; suffering, that is, not in the ordinary sense, but

'If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.'—Rom. viii. 17.

in the special manner entitling us to claim a reverent fellowship with His sufferings?

1. Christ's sufferings were, in every instance, wrongful sufferings. None of them followed as a consequence of His own errors or faults. He did no sin; suffering, therefore, never came to Him in the way of personal penalty. For others' sins He suffered. He suffered also for His own truth and righteousness. This is the first distinctive note of the sufferings of Christ. They were the result of the evil done by others and of the good done by Himself.

2. Christ's sufferings were not only wrongful, they were altogether willing sufferings: sufferings freely undertaken and rejoicingly endured. No necessity, save the compulsion of love, obliged our blessed Lord to enter the condition of a human sufferer. Of His own will He took our nature, that in that nature He might suffer for our sins. Suffering did not come to Him; He went to it. He might have avoided His Cross; but He took it up. At any moment of His anguish He might have prayed to His Father, and His Father would presently have sent twelve legions of angels to His rescue.¹ But He neither saved Himself nor prayed the Father to save Him from suffering. He was willingly born that He might willingly suffer; and He willingly suffered that He might mightily save.

All suffering *with* Christ has this voluntariness as its proper and peculiar characteristic. To be partakers of His sufferings we must be partakers of His willingness to suffer. No unwilling suffering is Christian suffering. Any good woman, or brave man, whether a Christian or not, will endure the ills to which flesh is heir—ills from which there is no escape—with patience and fortitude, without murmuring and cheerfully. But the Christian does more than this. He does not merely bear the cross which necessity lays upon his shoulders; he does not simply accept his fate with the courage of a noble pagan; he does even

¹ Mt 26⁵³.

more than practise the Old Testament grace of resignation; he gladly embraces the opportunity of suffering, not accepting deliverance¹; he joyfully enters into the spirit of His Master's saying, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and *take up his cross*, and follow Me.'²

3. But 'to suffer as a Christian'³ is more even than this: more than wrongful suffering willingly endured. It is suffering for the sake of others; and particularly for those who mock us, and despise us and do us wrong. The instincts of natural affection, the nobility of great aims in great causes, often oblige men and women, with a grand compulsion, to suffer even willingly. What mother will not willingly suffer any pangs for the fruit of her womb? What patriot will not willingly die for his fatherland? Every noble cause has had its martyrs, every glorious battle its heroes. Pagans could triumphantly sing, '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*'⁴ Inflamed by noble impulse, many have willingly died to save their friends. But this is not the suffering and the dying of the Lord Jesus. He loved them who did *not* love Him; He suffered for those who mocked Him; it was while we were enemies that He died for us.⁵ This is the third peculiar characteristic of the sufferings of Christ; He suffered for His enemies; for those who misrepresented and spat upon and hated Him. And to suffer as a Christian is, in imitation of our Lord, to have our sufferings inspired with His wondrous spirit, beautified with His self-deleting sacrifice.

4. But to suffer with Christ is much more than an imitation; it is a fellowship. The early Christians did not consider themselves copyists, but partakers, of their Saviour's sufferings. They suffered less like Him than with Him. Like Him, indeed, no merely human being can possibly suffer; because His sufferings were the divine atonement for sin. But with Him every genuine Christian desires to suffer. And this the Christian does, not only by remembering Christ's sufferings in contrite sympathy—weeping at the recollection of the sorrows with which the Saviour was afflicted, and hating the sins which were the cause of those sorrows—but by actual fellowship in the sufferings themselves.

It is impossible to understand what the New

¹ He 11³⁵.

² Mt 16²⁴.

³ 1 P 4¹⁶.

⁴ Horace's *Odes*, iii. 2.

⁵ Ro 5¹⁰.

Testament means by 'suffering with Christ,' unless we clearly grasp the mystical oneness of the Christian with Christ. The apostles and early Christians fully realized this union. To them Christianity meant being one with Christ; having Christ formed in them; not only living as Christ lived, thinking as He thought, speaking and doing as He spake and did, suffering and dying as He suffered and died, but living, thinking, suffering, dying together with Him, and finally rising again and being glorified together with Him eternally. Their foundation verity was, Thou in us and we in Thee. Everything they believed and wrought had this object in view—to unite them with, and make them conformable to, their living Lord. Baptism was to them incorporation with Christ; the laying on of hands a fresh infusion of His Spirit; the breaking of bread the actual communication of Him by faith; prayer and praise their channel of adoring access to the Father by reason of their oneness with Him. Their preaching was altogether personal, and founded on the fact of this union. They did not preach about Christ, they preached Him Himself; Himself as part of themselves, and themselves as incorporated in Him.

Thus to the early Christians the living, loving Christ was nearer and dearer than an example and pattern. They were more than mere followers and imitators of Him. He was their Head, they His members; He their Bridegroom, they His bride; He the Vine, they the branches; He the Root, they the fruit; He the Firstborn, they the brethren. As the Father was in Christ, so (they felt) the Christ was in the Christian. This had been their Lord's valedictory prayer, just before His great Agony: 'I pray, O Father that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.'⁶ This, and nothing less, was Christianity to the early Christians; incorporation, unity, identity with Christ; Christ in them, their Sacrifice and Hope; they in Christ, His redeemed and risen members.

It is impossible, I repeat, to understand the gospel without first learning this fundamental

⁶ Jn 17²¹⁻²³.

truth, this primary fact, of the indwelling of Christ in Christians and the indwelling of Christians in Christ. All such expressions as 'crucified with Christ,'¹ 'dead in Christ,'² 'buried with Christ,'³ 'risen with Christ,'⁴ are utterly meaningless unless we first lay hold of the truth of the unity of Christ and the Christian, the identity of the Christian with Christ. We in Him and He in us; *that* is the heart and essence of the gospel. When once we have grasped this foundation-verity, everything else easily follows and becomes quite clear. The Incarnation is then seen to be the entering of God into the nature of man, and Redemption the bearing and blotting out of man's sins by the obedience unto death of the Son of God, who is also Son of man. It is the fact of this unity which gives reality to the Cross. The Sacrifice of the Cross is no fictitious imputation of our sins to Him and of His righteousness to us. No; by reason of our identity with Him and His unity with us, He became sin for us, though He knew no sin; and we become, notwithstanding our sinfulness, accepted and righteous in Him. This therefore is the name whereby He shall be called, the Son of man our Sin, and the Son of God our Righteousness.

It is also, and only, by means of this key—namely, the truth of the mystical incorporation of the Christian with Christ—that we can fully open the New Testament teaching in reference to Christian suffering; for it is by virtue of this incorporation that when Christ suffered His disciples suffered in Him, and when they suffer He suffers in them. Because He and they are one, therefore His sufferings are their sufferings and their sufferings are His sufferings. It was their realization of this fellowship with Christ which made the early Christians rejoice in suffering. They were more than content, they were glad to suffer. They gloried in it. Suffering was an additional seal of sonship; a new pledge in tears and blood of their union with their afflicted and ascended Lord. Suffering with Christ on earth was to them an earnest that in heaven they would be glorified together with Him. They constantly said among themselves: 'If we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He will also deny us.'⁵

¹ Gal 2²⁰.² 2 Ti 2¹¹.³ Col 2¹².⁴ Col 3¹.⁵ 2 Ti 2¹¹⁻¹².

This fact of union with Christ also explains what St. Paul means by the remarkable expression, 'Filling up that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ.'⁶ St. Paul felt that he, being part of Christ, was a fellow-worker and fellow-sufferer with Him. It is a wonderful thought that, both in doing and suffering, Christ permits His disciples to 'fill up' and complete His work. In a very true and glorious sense Christ's work is absolutely finished. But in a sense equally true and grand He has been graciously pleased to permit His disciples to carry on His work for the salvation of mankind. For this cause His Church exists; to witness and work and suffer for Him. When we work we are workers together with Him: and when we suffer our sufferings are His sufferings. The Eucharist has been described as the extension of the Incarnation; with at least equal truth may Christian sufferings and Christian afflictions be regarded as an extension of the afflictions and sufferings of Christ. We are so identified with Him, He so actually abides in us and we in Him, that His Cross is our Cross, our trials and sorrows His sorrows and trials: we suffered in Him almost two thousand years ago and His sufferings are being completed and filled up by us to-day.

To suffer, then, with Christ is not only to suffer wrongfully for righteousness' sake, to suffer willingly on behalf of those who oppose themselves and are our enemies; it is also, in a very real sense, to be partakers of His sufferings as the body partakes of the sufferings of the head, as joint-heirs have fellowship in whatever betides them both.

And if we are faithful we need not fear but that the privilege and the exceeding joy of thus suffering with Christ will be granted us. Now that Christianity is established in our land and is the professional creed even of the comfortable unbeliever, we shall not indeed be called upon to endure the physical sufferings, the stripes and imprisonments, the cruelties and deaths, endured by apostles and early Christians. Yet sufferings are none the less real and keen because they are not physical, outward in the flesh; but mental, inward in the spirit. The reproach of being narrow and dogmatic is not easy for the liberal and enlightened to bear. To seem to affect spiritual superiority, even when burdened with

⁶ Col 1²⁴.

the conviction of sinfulness, is a real cross to humble minds and sensitive souls. To feel that we are misunderstood, even when doing our best for Christ's sake, how hard it is! To be enthusiastic among cynics; to believe in goodness in spite of sneers and failures; to look sad when others laugh at profane and wanton jests; to refuse to go where others go and do as others do, not in condemnation of them but in loyalty to Christ; to deny ourselves the intellectual delight of a brilliant book, because its tendency is to carnalize love and undermine the sanctity of marriage and belittle the grandeur and desecrate the pieties of human life,—none of these things are easy or pleasant. To live with Christ in a Christless home, to be religious among the irreligious, to deny ourselves in order to give alms to God, to read our Bibles and say our prayers and attend our worship and observe the Eucharistic rite, in the midst of worldly temptations and worldly surroundings, to be bold for Christ although timid in ourselves; and to do all this without affectation, in the singleness of devotion, is sometimes an agony, and always means suffering.

Yet in thus patiently, gently, quietly, unostentatiously suffering, we have, indeed, a great reward. Often we proclaim Christ more effectually by suffering, than working, for Him. As reflected lights our sufferings fill up the magnetic glory of His redemptive passion. By suffering, too, we are ourselves established, strengthened, settled in

Christ.¹ When the sufferings of Christ abound in us, then the consolations of Christ abound by us.² The fellowship of His sufferings arms us with His mind.³ As He Himself was made perfect through sufferings, so by suffering with Him we, in turn, are gradually led upward towards His perfection.⁴ As we bear about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, the life also of Jesus is made manifest in our body.⁵

Finally, let us remember that if we are one with Christ in suffering we shall also be one with Him in glory. But the suffering comes first; the glory follows. Good Friday is before Easter Day, the Cross before the Crown. We must know the fellowship of His sufferings, and be conformable to His death, before we can know the power of His resurrection. Every suffering of the Christian, even unavoidable disappointment, bereavement, affliction, loss, is a suffering with Christ; because the Christian is always one with Christ. But wrongful, willing sufferings, sufferings for truth and righteousness' sake,—sufferings for those who love us not and thank us not,—are, in an especial sense, Christian sufferings. And when all the sufferings of all the saints have completely filled up the afflictions of Christ, then His glory shall appear. And if so be we now are suffering with Him, we shall then with Him be glorified together.

¹ I P 5²⁰.² I Co I⁵.³ I P 4¹.⁴ He 2¹⁰.⁵ 2 Co 4¹⁰.

Contributions and Comments.

John viii. 57 in the Codex Vaticanus.

It is quite evident that my esteemed friend Dr. Nestle has not examined the same facsimile of the Codex Vaticanus as I have done, for in the volume published in 1868 by the Congregation 'De Propaganda Fide' in Rome, the *o* of *εορακες* has not been changed to *ω*. I grant that Dr. Nestle may be right in his contention that the blank space after this word may be merely there on purpose to divide it off from the following paragraph; and he certainly makes a point in his suggestion that there is no *v*; the reading in Codex Sinaiticus being *εωρακενσε*. But this is a case where the whole truth cannot be learnt from the best of facsimiles;

and I have therefore accepted the kind offer of a Cambridge friend¹ to have an investigation made of the passage in the manuscript itself. Yet it seems to me that even if there be no scratch on the vellum of the Vaticanus after this word, the corroboration of the Greek Sinaiticus to the Syriac

¹ Since writing the above, I have received the following communication to my friend from Dr. Ehrle, the learned head of the Vatican Library. I fear your readers will say that it confirms Dr. Nestle's view rather than mine;—'In the Codex Vaticanus at Jn 8⁵⁷ (1) there is not the slightest sign of an erasure, not the slightest indication to show that a letter has been altered; (2) the space left blank after the *εορακες* is the space left usually between the verses; (3) hence nothing can be said than that B has originally *kes*, and that afterwards an *a* has been put over the *ε*.'